

Negotiating romantic and sexual relationships:
Patterns and meanings of mediated interaction

BY

Kiley A. Larson

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Chairperson Nancy Baym

Co-Chairperson Mary Lee Hummert

Adrianne Kunkel

Tracy Russo

Allan Hanson

Date Defended: 4/18/2011

The Dissertation Committee for Kiley A. Larson
certifies that this is the approved version of the following dissertation:

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Chairperson Nancy Baym

Co-Chairperson Mary Lee Hummert

Date approved: 4/26/11

Abstract

Everyday life is characterized by multimodality (Walther & Parks, 2002), but little research has examined how media use is incorporated into romantic/sexual relationships. The purpose of this dissertation was to better understand how communication technologies are being integrated into romantic and/or sexual relationships across stages of relational development and to uncover the underlying patterns of, expectations for, and meanings associated with that media use. In order to address this purpose, mixed-methods were employed. During phase one, 37 semi-structured interviews were conducted, which allowed for the qualitative exploration of the expectations and meanings participants attached to media use in romantic/sexual relationships. This was followed by phase two, in which a survey was constructed based upon the findings highlighted in the interview analysis and administered to 120 participants.

This study adds to the growing body of literature about how young adults are incorporating communication technologies into their courtship practices (e.g., Gershon, 2010a, 2010b; Jin & Peña, 2010; Pascoe, 2009). First, these results confirm that college students are not following traditional scripts for engaging in romantic relationships (see also Bogle, 2008; Pascoe, 2009). Second, by examining how students talk about their romantic and sexual entanglements, this study uncovered and defined four terms they frequently used to describe their relationships: talking to, hanging out, dating, and hooking up. Third, the results of this study indicate that as relationships grow closer, individuals are more likely to communicate with their partners over the phone. Finally, this dissertation couples traditional interpersonal communication theories - uncertainty reduction and facework - with perspectives about media use: technological affordances and media symbolism. Results revealed that within romantic/sexual relationships characterized by high relational uncertainty (Knobloch &

Solomon, 1999), partners negotiate potentially face-threatening situations by strategically employing technologies that allowed them to most effectively preserve their positive face.

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Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

Developing romantic relationships is a complicated business. Sorting out how to move from an initial meeting to a lasting romantic relationship or perhaps to a brief sexual relationship (or vice versa) has never been easy. From gentleman suitors asking parental permission to call on their daughters, to sexting (the texting of sexually explicit material), courtship in America has gone through substantial changes in the last century (Bailey, 1988; Bogle, 2008). No longer are young adults, especially those in college, relying on traditional dating scripts to guide their courtship behavior (Bogle, 2007, 2007; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Paul & Hayes, 2002). This shift from dating, which has likely been occurring since the 1960s (Bailey, 1988; Whyte, 1990), coupled with the rise of new communication technologies, has resulted in concern about the courtship practices of young adults in mainstream media channels. For instance, recently *New York Times* Op-Ed columnist David Brooks (2009) lamented the loss of traditional courtship where the rules for dating were clear and men and women knew the ‘proper’ ways to comport themselves in romantic relationships.

In this piece Brooks (2009) positions new personal communication technologies (PCTs) as the drivers of social change. PCTs are technologies that facilitate the development or maintenance of personal relationships. They include mobile devices that allow for phoning and texting, web-based platforms like social network sites (e.g., Facebook), email and instant messaging. Brooks opines that feminism has done away with old cultural notions about how romantic relationships ought to be conducted (i.e., progress from dating to marriage to sex) and that new communication technologies, texting especially, are disrupting the formation of appropriate new scripts for courtship behavior. This supposed normative decomposition, he

says, has encouraged the development of a dating meat market, in which people who are meeting face-to-face are cast aside when their potential partners get text messages from a more promising contender. Brooks's (2009) concern about the ways in which new communication media will alter forever the face of romantic relationships is not new and in fact has a long history (see for example, Fischer, 1992; Marvin, 1988; Standage, 1998).

Before the invention of the telegraph in the 1800s, transcending space incurred inevitable time delays. Messages often took years to reach their audiences. The telegraph dramatically changed the communication landscape by allowing real time communication across long distances for the first time. People were at first skeptical and then astonished by this marvel of human invention (Standage, 1998). While this technology did not allow the general public to engage in continuous interaction with distant others, the operators working in telegraph offices soon found that their downtime was well spent using the technology to chat with telegraph operators in other offices. As Standage (1998) describes, this led to the formation of new relationships with peers they had never met in person. The relational partners' families and peers often regarded these types of long distance relationships with suspicion, concerned that the telegraph had led their loved one to be hoodwinked by an un-seeable other.

A similar, and perhaps more widespread, pattern of discourse surrounds the telephone. The introduction of the telephone into American households brought with it uncertainty and concern about how the technology would affect courtship. Marvin (1988) listed the threats posed by 'irregular courtship' to traditional practices:

New forms of communication created unprecedented opportunities not only for courting and infidelity, but for romancing unacceptable persons outside one's own class, and even one's own race, in circumstances that went unobserved by the regular community. The

potential for illicit sexual behavior had obvious disquieting power to undermine unaccustomed centers of moral authority and social order (Marvin 1988, p. 70).

Much like Brooks, journalists writing during the diffusion of telephone technology lamented the downfall of the traditional suitor (Marvin, 1988). Marvin (1988) recounts an editorial printed in the *New York Sun* about an enterprising suitor who took full advantage of the technological affordances of the telephone to sweep in, via phone call, and offer a proposal of marriage to a young maiden, while her more ‘old fashioned’ suitor waited patiently in the parlor for the object of his affection to return. This disruption of proper courtship decorum was much maligned in the press (Marvin, 1988). Academics were also upset by the popularity of the telephone and many worried that relationships mediated by phone calls would be somehow inauthentic and would impair social relations (Fischer, 1992).

Public discourse about communication media often follows predictable patterns and concerns about incorporating media into romantic relationships have been ongoing. When a new communication technology is introduced there is a strong tendency for public (and private) discourse to construct the technology as a change agent (Nye, 1997). This type of technologically deterministic discourse about new technologies suggests that the technologies themselves, as opposed to the people who develop and use them, are causing change to our interpersonal relationships. While there seems to be a general fascination with how these technologies are radically changing our relationships, it is just as important to consider how human actors are engaging with these technologies. One perspective that takes this into account is Hutchby’s (2001a, 2001b) discussion of technological affordances.

Technological affordances. From this perspective, the ‘consequences’ of new technologies stem from the interaction of the materiality of the technology itself and the social

conditions within which the technology is used (Hutchby, 2001a, 2001b). In this way, new technologies are texts to be ‘read and interpreted,’ but always within the bounds of the affordances of the technology (Hutchby, 2001a, 2001b). These affordances are features of the technology itself that set limits on the possibilities of human action and interpretation. Thus, “technological artifacts both promote certain forms of interactions between participants and constrain the possibilities for other forms of interaction” (Hutchby, 2001b, p. 32). Baym (2010) compiled a set of seven qualities that can be used to compare and contrast the affordances of communication technologies: interactivity, temporal structure, social cues, storage, replicability, reach and mobility.

These affordances help explain why PCTs might be used for different purposes within the confines of a romantic relationship. *Interactivity* refers to a medium’s ability to facilitate social interaction. For the purposes of this study, interactivity is a requirement; PCTs have to have the ability to allow for interpersonal interaction in order to be included. For example, the television, while useful for transmitting news and providing entertainment, is not a practical medium through which to have serious conversation with a romantic partner.

Temporal structure is the time delay between a message being sent and that message being received. Channels can allow for either asynchronous or synchronous communication. Asynchronous communication, which generally occurs through email, Facebook wall posts or voicemail, occurs when there is a time lapse between when a message is sent and when that message is received and replied to. Synchronous communication, which is generally associated with face-to-face, phone calls and instant messaging, occurs in real time with messages being instantaneously sent and received. While some channels lend themselves more readily to either synchronous or asynchronous communication, in practice the channel used cannot always predict

the temporal structure. Text messaging, for example, can occur so rapidly that the communication becomes synchronous; on the other hand, delays between sending and receiving message are also common.

In addition to interactivity and temporal structure, media differ in their ability to provide *social cues*, or those nonverbal aspects of communication that “provide further information regarding context, the meaning of messages, and the identities of the people interacting” (Baym, 2010, p. 9). While some forms of communication, like face-to-face, are rich in nonverbal cues, others, like email or texting, allow for fewer contextual cues to be shared. Media also vary based upon their ability to *store* a message for later retrieval. Some communication channels, like email and Facebook messaging, are easily stored. Others, like face-to-face or telephone mediated communication, are more ephemeral. Without the aid of a recording device it is impossible to capture the content of a face-to-face or phone conversation. Email and text messages, on the other hand, are automatically stored and have to be deleted by the users. *Replicability* and *reach* go hand-in-hand with storage. Replicability is the ability to copy a message, while reach is the number of people a message can reach quickly. Emails, for example, are easily stored, replicated and sent to large numbers of people. The last media affordance is mobility, or “the extent to which a medium is portable” and allows users to send messages “regardless of location” (Baym, 2010, p. 11). Cell phones are exceptionally mobile as they fit easily into the pocket of the user and enable communication across distance.

While media affordances are important to understanding how they might be employed differently in romantic/sexual relationships, domestication (Silverstone, Hirsch, & Morley, 1992) also provides perspective on how technologies are incorporated into everyday life. Silverstone et al. (1992) conceived of domestication as a dialectic, ongoing process of the human – machine

encounter. From this perspective, technology is constantly defined by and in turn defines the communities that adopt or resist it, the cultures that perform it, and the relationships in which it is entangled (see also Hijazi-Omari & Ribak, 2008; Ling, 2004). The construction of technology is not an isolated, self-acting force (Williams, 1990); PCTs come to mean different things when used for different purposes in different social contexts (e.g., Bijker & Law, 1992; Bijker, Hughes, & Pinch 1987; see also Blumer, 1969). Working from a domestication perspective requires that we ask how technology “enables and enhances human action; and how it derives its meaning, as an object, from cultural practice” (Hijazi-Omari & Ribak, 2008, p. 151). Even though a technology might become mundane in one context, when transported into a different context, the meaning that technology takes on could be back in flux (Haddon, 2001). For example, texting is a habitualized action for many American college students. A recent Pew Internet and American Life Project estimates that 95% of people ages 18-34 own a mobile phone and 94% of those 18-34 who own a mobile phone use it to send text messages (Zickuhr, 2011). While sending text messages to friends and family might not engender much confusion, for people trying to successfully navigate a relationship with a new romantic interest, a text message may become fraught with additional meaning. This change of context might turn a seemingly everyday activity into one that causes uncertainty and perhaps requires the assistance of others to successfully negotiate. Drawing from these two theoretical backgrounds, this project examines the ways in which PCTs are gaining meaning and enabling human (inter)action in romantic and/or sexual relationships.

Young adult PCT use. More than any other time in history, individuals have access to a vast array of communication technologies through which to initiate, sustain, nurture and dissolve our interpersonal relationships. One can communicate with a relational partner via mobile

devices, which can include both voice calls, texting, and for many people, access to the internet. Once logged on, people can chat with, email, and interact through the various channels available through our social networking sites, or even tweet at each other. Individuals can also, if they happen to be in the same physical location as a relational partner, talk with them face-to-face. There are many choices available when contacting others. Successfully negotiating problematic situations, such as determining the proper way to contact a potential romantic partner, is important because it affects both the quality and longevity of relationships, which can affect the mental health of relational partners.

College students are particularly likely to have access to, and use, multiple PCTs. As noted above, a recent study conducted by the Pew Internet and American Life Project (2011) indicates that 95% of Americans aged 18-34, also called Millennials, own a mobile phone. Millennials were significantly more likely to use their mobile devices for more purposes, including texting, sending email and going online, than people in any other generation (Zickuhr, 2011). This age group is also more likely to own a laptop computer (74%) than they are to own a desktop computer (57%) (Zickuhr, 2011) and the vast majority (93%) are online (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). Nearly three-quarters (72%) of Millennials who are online use social networking sites, like Facebook or MySpace (Lenhart et al., 2011). However, we still know little about how young adults navigate the use of PCTs in multimodal romantic relationships, meaning those relationships that are conducted through multiple media simultaneously (c.f. Gershon, 2010; Jin & Peña, 2010; Pascoe, 2009).

In one study that examines PCT use in romantic relationships, Pascoe (2009) relied on qualitative data to detail teenagers' normative new media practices. New forms of mediated communication allowed teens to develop relationships in ways that "make them feel less

vulnerable than face-to-face communication” (Pascoe, 2009, p. 123). Similarly, Gershon (2010a, 2010b) found that her interviewees thought that text messaging was an informal medium that they could use initiate flirtatious exchanges in relationships. Both Gershon (2010a, 2010b) and Pascoe (2009) argue that media switching can be used to indicate new levels of relationship seriousness.

Study purpose. While there is research that investigates how people use internet technologies in developing relationships that began online (e.g., Lea & Spears, 1995; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Parks & Roberts, 1998; Tong & Walther, 2010; Whitty & Gavin, 2001; Wright, 2004), and research that examines how PCTs are incorporated into friendships and classmate relationships (e.g., Baym, Zhang, & Lin, 2004; Chen, Boase, & Wellman, 2002; Ledbetter, 2008; Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Quan-Haase, Wellman, Witte, & Hampton, 2002), fewer studies have focused on multimodal romantic/sexual relationships. Because we know that technologies are integrated into our everyday lives and relationships (Baym, 2009; Ledbetter, 2008, 2009; Parks, 2009; Walther & Parks, 2002) and that they are incorporated into romantic relationships in meaningful ways (Gershon, 2010; Jin & Peña, 2010; Pascoe, 2009), it makes sense to study not only how relationships develop offline or how they develop online, but how people often develop relationships simultaneously through multiple media. Thus, the purpose of this dissertation is to better understand how PCTs are being incorporated into romantic and/or sexual relationships across stages of relational development. In doing so, I uncover patterns of, expectations for and meanings associated with media use while accounting for the multimodality that characterizes everyday life.

Method overview. In order to address the broad purpose of this research project, a mixed method, specifically a sequential exploratory design (Creswell, 2009), was employed.

Briefly, a sequential exploratory design is a data collection process that takes place in two phases, the first being qualitative and the second quantitative. A mixed method approach is useful because it allows for both the exploration of participants' meanings for PCT use in their own words and exploring the generalizability of these qualitative findings in a larger sample (Creswell, 2009).

The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of meanings that surround PCT use through semi-structured interviews with students at a large Midwestern University. College students represent a particularly appropriate sample through which to examine the integration of PCTs into developing relationships, given that for many of them PCT use has already become habituated (Pew Project on the Internet and American Life, 2002). The purpose of this phase of data collection was to discover themes in college student talk that relate to their use of communication technologies in romantic and sexual relationships.

Following Creswell (2009), quantitative research questions/hypotheses were formulated after the completion of the initial qualitative phase. Based upon the constructs and the relationships between those constructs developed through the qualitative procedures, a survey was developed and administered to university students. This helped articulate the relationship(s) between the qualitatively identified constructs and demonstrate their generalizability. Qualitative data was initially collected because the variables and constructs that underlie the role of PCTs in romantic relationships are largely unstudied and no coherent map of relationships between constructs related to relational communication, technology and relationship development was available.

Literature Review

A brief history of American youth courtship practices. Like Brooks (2009), many have called for a return of a more traditional style of courtship, assuming, of course, that the old way is inherently better than the new way. While these misgivings might be by-products of nostalgia, it is helpful to contextualize contemporary romantic and sexual relationship practices within those of years past. Bailey (1988), a social historian who wrote about American “wooing” practices, defined courtship as, “a wide variety of conditions, intentions, and actions” by which men and women “woo each other,” not all (or even many of which) of which are “intended to lead to marriage” (p. 6). By this definition, any practice that occurs within the context of developing or attempting to develop a romantic/sexual relationship can be considered courtship. Although it is not a term that modern day college students would likely use to describe their relationships, I use the term “courtship” for the sake of consistency and convenience.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, the practice of in-person “calling” dominated American courtship practices (1988). During this era, a young man would “call” on a young woman at her home. During his visit, he would spend time with both the young woman and her family. Often the young woman would play the piano to entertain her guest. The young couple might be afforded some privacy during the visit, especially if her mother knew her daughter really liked the young man (Bailey, 1988; Rothman, 1984). As important as this script was to the middle- and upper-classes, it did not work well for the working class youths who often did not have an appropriate space in their homes to facilitate calling practices. This led working class youth to eventually abandon the practice of calling. Instead, they began going out in public together, which, over time, became to be known as a “date” (Bailey, 1988).

Dating did not remain only a working class practice for long and was soon adopted by middle- and upper-class youths who began going out to avoid the watchful eyes of parents. This “going out” was most often to a restaurant or the theatre, however, the location of the date did not matter as much as the going out somewhere together did. As Bailey (1988) puts it, “dating moved courtship into the public world, relocating it from family parlors and community events to restaurant, theaters, and dance halls” (p. 13). As the 1920’s progressed, the exponential growth in dating was not only due to youth rebellion, but also to social changes and technological advancements (Bailey, 1988; Rothman, 1984). During this time in history women were becoming increasingly involved in the public sphere. Women’s increased access to systems outside of the home, including college and the working world, coupled with the independence afforded by the proliferation of automobile ownership, created conditions where young men could more easily take young women “out on the town.” (Bogle, 2008; Rothman, 1984). By the mid-1920s, dating was a widespread American custom (Bailey, 1988).

During the late 1920’s and 1930’s, the practice of “rating and dating” (Waller, 1937) became common. In this time period dating became a competitive practice and whom one dated could determine his or her social standing (Waller, 1937). In order to “rate” one needed to date as many members of the opposite sex as possible, as long as their partners were highly “ranked” (i.e., seen as desirable by one’s peers). In fact, on some college campuses, students, both men and women, developed lists that explicitly rated members of opposite sex according to their attractiveness. During this time, dating a large number of attractive others was seen as advantageous and being in an exclusive dating relationship, at least until one was ready to get engaged, was largely scorned (Bailey, 1988; Bogle, 2008).

While these practices were common, they did not last. The start and aftermath of World War II in the 1940s led to a new version of courtship (Bailey, 1988). Because of the war, men in America during this time period “literally became a scarce resource” (Bogle, 2008). Millions of men had joined the armed forces and left home; thousands had gone to war and had not made it back home alive. Popularity was no longer determined by the number of high-ranking dates one went on. Instead, youth were more focused on exclusively dating or “going steady” with one partner (Bailey, 1988; Bogle, 2008; Modell, 1989). By the 1950s, new teen dating rituals became formalized. Youth who “went steady” indicated their unavailability to other by trading class rings, letter sweaters, ID bracelets, or by wearing matching jackets (Bailey, 1988). As in the 1930s, steady dating was not meant to lead directly to marriage. Serial monogamy became the norm, with youths moving from one “steady” to the next until a mate was selected (Bailey, 1988).

Some scholars who studied historical dating practices argue that a shift away from traditional dating began during the sexual revolution of the 1960s (Bailey, 1988; Modell, 1989, Rothman, 1984; Whyte, 1990). According to Bailey (1988), the mid-1960s represent a period of change in American culture that brought about a new system of courtship. During the 1970s and 1980s formal dating became one option among many other dating practices, rather than the primary form of youth courtship (Modell, 1989). During this time, instead of pair dating, college students “began socializing in groups and ‘partying’ with large numbers of friends and classmates” (Bogle, 2008, p. 20). It is this point in history, fueled by cultural changes, such as a delay in marriage, an emphasis on “playing the field” before settling down, and an increasing large number of women attending college, that Bogle (2008) argues the hookup era began to emerge.

Although hooking up is not a new term and references to this practice can be found in research dating back to the 1980s (Murray, 1991), it was not studied systematically until the early 2000s (Bogle, 2008). Hooking up, according to Bogle (2007) is a term, that when used by college students, refers to “a man and woman pairing off at the end of a party or evening at a bar to engage in physical/sexual encounter. The hookup can involve anything from kissing to sexual intercourse or anything seen as falling in-between these two ends of the sexual spectrum” (p. 776). The hallmark of a hookup encounter is that, regardless of the type of sexual activity, there are no relational obligations. Thus, the sexual behavior the pair engages in is not linked to emotional intimacy or relational commitment. The hookup script is also much less formal than traditional dating, and there are no expectations about who ought to pay for expenses (Bogle, 2007, 2008). Bogle (2007, 2008) asserts that the hookup script has largely replaced the dating script as the primary way college students form romantic and sexual relationships (see also Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000).

Bogle (2007, 2008) argues that while college courtship practices have evolved, the vast majority of literature on heterosexual dating does not examine the reality of “*how* men and women meet and form sexual and romantic relationships” (2007, p. 779). Instead, she argues that researchers have focused on couples or assumed that dating is still the primary way college students form romantic/sexual relationships and then moved onto studying various aspects of dating relationships from there (see for example, Laner & Ventrone, 2000; Mongeau & Johnson, 1995; Mongeau, Morr Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004; Morr & Mongeau, 2004; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008). For example, Morr Serewicz and Gale (2008) examined first date scripts in a college student population. Instead of questioning the relevance of the first date itself or asking participants to report the number of “first dates” they have been on in college, they assumed that

dating was the standard script. Likewise, Mongeau, Morr Serewicz, and Therrien (2004) examined ‘first date’ goals. By asking students to report on the reasons they had for going on their most recent first date, they were, once again, assuming that dates are part of a contemporary relationship formation script. While students in these studies were able to recite the traditional dating script that does not mean that they were regularly enacting it.

Similarly, Knobloch (2006) found that individuals who simulated leaving a date-request message on their romantic partner’s voicemail communicated less fluently when they were unsure about the status of their relationship. While compelling, this finding is predicated upon two assumptions: (1) the phone is the primary technology through which students arrange dates and (2) students are asking each other out on ‘dates.’ Although some students become a couple through a process where one does go on an official first date before becoming boyfriend/girlfriend, many others do not (Bogle, 2008; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Paul & Hayes, 2002). These types of studies provide valuable information about how students expect dates to proceed, but do not take into account the actual practices students engage in when forming romantic/sexual relationships. This project examines how men and women on a college campus are forming romantic and/or sexual relationships in their own words, focusing especially on their use of communication technologies as they navigate these relationships.

In addition to the fact that many studies about college courtship presuppose a script that has become obsolete, the terms ‘date’ and dating no longer mean the same thing to contemporary college students (Bogle, 2008; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001). According to both Bogle (2008) and Glenn and Marquardt (2001), contemporary college students “are not referring to dating in the traditional sense [...]. Rather they are referring to either a man and a woman, who are *already a couple*, going out on a date, or to attending a fraternity or sorority function accompanied by a

date” (Bogle, 2007, p. 776). Bogle (2007) also argues that researchers also need to be aware of the multiplicity of meanings both of the terms dating and hooking up can have. In addition to dating and hooking up, Banker, Kaestle, and Allen (2010), in their qualitative study of 57 college student’s narratives about college courtship, identified five other words that college students are using to talk about their relationships when they were not clearly seriously romantic or purely sexual: hanging out, talking, friends, flirting and casual dating. Although the authors did not provide clear definitions for all terms, they did clarify what they meant by hanging out and “talking.”

According to Banker et al. (2010), hanging out occurs when two people are ready for others to know they are interested in one another, for some in their sample, hanging out was a stage of relationship development that occurred after “talking.” “Talking” is an emergent relationship, hallmarked by a casual interest in another person (Banker et al., 2010). Bogle (2008) and Pascoe (2007) also found that young adults used the term ‘talking to’ to describe the initial stages of relationship development. However, not all students in their sample agreed about terminology. Because of the shifting nature of terms used to describe romantic relationships on college campuses (Banker, Kaestle, & Allen, 2010; Bogle, 2007, 2008; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001), it is important to have students in this project describe and define the terms they are using in their own romantic/sexual relationship development. Therefore the following research question is proposed:

RQ1: What terms are college students using to describe their romantic and/or sexual relationships?

This section provided historical perspective on the dating practices of young adults in America, charting the evolution of these practices from “calling” to hooking up. However in order to

better understand how relationships develop at the micro level, it is important to address scholarship that tracks the relational trajectory relational development as people move from strangers to committed partners (or somewhere in-between). Of interest will be how contemporary young adults are using PCTs to construct new and restructure old dating/sexual relationship practices and rituals. Before delineating how young adults are incorporating PCTs into their romantic/sexual relationship development, prior research about relationship development, both offline and online, will be addressed.

Trajectories of relationship development: Offline. Close relationship theorists and researchers have long been interested in how relationships develop offline (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Knapp, 1978; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005; Levinger, 1983). Many models of relational development posit a series of stages through which couples pass as they grow closer through increased self disclosure and development of relational cultures (Altman & Taylor, 1973, 1978; Knapp, 1978; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005; Levinger, 1983). While the models differ in their theoretical underpinnings, all hold that certain behaviors manifest in patterned ways and that communication is the driving force that prompts movement between stages. A stage model developed by Knapp (1978) and further developed by Knapp and Vangelisti (2005) attempted to synthesize and expand upon the substantial body of prior research while detailing the ways in which communication both prompts and changes with relational development. Although there are other theorists who examine stages of relational development, Knapp and Vangelisti's (2005) model is focused on communication in relationships whereas others (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973; Levinger, 1983) draw more heavily from psychological processes.

According to Knapp and Vangelisti (2005), stages can be identified by the proportion, measured as either frequency of occurrence or relative weight given to communicative acts by relational partners, of communication typical of a given stage. The metaphor for describing relational development that Knapp (1978; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005) chose was a staircase, where each step denotes a new relational stage. Although this implies linearity and predictably in relational development, Knapp and Vangelisti (2005) argue that relational movement can be both forward and backward and that dialectical tensions (e.g., Baxter & Montgomery, 1996) are present at all times within each stage of development. Thus, this model both helps explain how relationships can progress systematically from non-intimate to intimate, but does not oversimplify the process by suggesting that the development is always in the direction of complete openness, connectedness and intimacy.

In describing this model, Knapp (1978) proposed five stages of relational development. First, “initiating” involves opening the channels of communication between people; it is the stage where we first come to interact with another person. Communication in this stage tends to be superficial and focused on social niceties. Second, “experimenting” captures the movement from superficial to more personal communication. Here, strangers trying to become acquaintances attempt to further reduce their uncertainty about each other, which is generally accomplished through the norm of self-disclosure reciprocity. Often at this stage, strangers are searching for common ground on which to build further conversation by engaging in small talk. If relationships continue to develop, they move into Knapp’s (1978) third stage, “intensifying.” In this stage a unique relational culture begins to develop as partners become more informal in their communication. The depth of personal disclosure increases here, nicknames are often used, use of the first person plural “we” becomes increasingly common and direct expressions of

commitment appear. The fourth stage of relational development is “integrating,” wherein the two individuals symbolically fuse to become a single entity. Here communication becomes easy between partners who share nearly everything with one another. The final stage in the model is “bonding,” where the couple engages in a public ritual that formalizes and makes public their commitment. Knapp and Vangelisti (2005) also take into account that complete interdependence is not the goal for every, or even most, of the relationships people form. Thus, they argue that this model does not attempt to prescribe the ways in which a relationship should develop. Instead it describes the ways in which relationships often do develop through relational interaction and emphasizes the role of interaction in relationship construction.

Honeycutt and colleagues (1989; 1992) have argued that stages are not an inherent part of relationship development; rather it is cognition that constructs these phases. According to their research, which examined cognitive representations of relational development, relational phases or stages “exist in memory in the representation of expectancies for prototypical behaviors that occur within romantic relationships. The expectancies represent internal guides for behavior that help individuals recognize behaviors and promote labeling of experiences” (p. 80). Thus, stages of relational development exist in the minds of the individuals rather than in the ‘reality’ of relationships. We then are able to use this knowledge as a guide for our relational behavior.

We acquire these knowledge structures and learn about these expectations through interaction with parents, siblings, peers and through exposure to mass media. From a very young age we are exposed to messages steeped in cultural norms about the ways romantic relationships ought to develop. For example, a common American grade school chant goes, “first comes love, then comes marriage, then comes baby in the baby carriage.” Western fairytales emphasize the prince saving the princess from her evil captor and then getting married

and living happily ever after. This exposure extends to messages about how media ought to be used in romantic relationships. A ubiquitous scene in American films depicts a woman waiting anxiously by the phone willing it to ring and hoping that it will be ‘him’ calling. These common portrayals of relational development provide us with the events, and the order in which those events are supposed to occur, within romantic and/or sexual relationships. In other words, these cultural constructions serve as scripts for how we ought to ‘do’ romantic relationships (Holmberg & Mackenzie, 2002). Because these cognitive structures are developed through interactions with others (Honeycutt, 1989), patterns of knowledge about and expectations for relationship development are constructed. Thus, people have a repertoire of behaviors that fit into existing relational schemata as being relationally positive and appropriate or as being negative and inappropriate (Anderson, 1983). As Planalp (1985) states, “people enter interaction with some sense of what communicative behaviors are appropriate for the type of relationship” (p. 3).

However little empirical research has addressed our expectations for how PCTs should be used in developing romantic relationships. While Honeycutt, Cantrill, and Greene’s (1989) work provides evidence that people perceive telephone use as vital to progressing through the second stage of relationship development, which roughly aligns with Knapp and Vangelisti’s ‘exploratory stage,’ their study did not examine the meanings that relationship partners attached to phone use in their beginning romantic relationships. Additionally, the influx of new PCTs might be disrupting previously developed cognitive structures because people have to grapple with what it means to be multimodal during courting and/or sexual relationships.

Trajectories of relationship development: Online. In addition to detailing how relationships develop offline, scholars have also described the ways in which relationships

develop online. However, it was not always clear that close relationships could form via computer-mediated communication (CMC). Early theorists argued that CMC would be a poor medium for interpersonal communication (e.g., Daft & Lengel, 1986; Daft, Lengel, & Trevino, 1987; Sproull & Kiesler, 1986) and made bleak predictions about the ability of media with reduced social cues to foster interpersonal connections. Based in media richness (Daft & Lengel, 1986) and social presence (Short, Williams, & Christie, 1976) theories, cues-filtered-out perspectives held that interpersonal interaction online was destined to be, at best, superficial and task-oriented, and, at worst, out-right hostile. However, second wave theorists have detailed the many ways in which people can and do form meaningful relationships via CMC (e.g., Baym, 1996; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Parks & Roberts, 1998; Walther, 1996). Currently, most research points to online relationships being as meaningful to those who form them as relationships begun face-to-face (Henderson & Gilding, 2004; Lea & Spears, 1995; McKenna, Green, & Gleason, 2002; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Parks & Roberts, 1998; Whitty & Gavin, 2001; Wright, 2004).

As relationships initiated online grow in closeness, they rarely stay ‘online only’ (McKenna et al., 2002; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Parks & Roberts, 1998). As these relationships progress, relational partners incorporate different PCTs into their communication with one another (McKenna et al., 2002; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Parks & Roberts, 1998). For example, Parks and Roberts’ (1998) examination of relationship formation in MOOs (multiuser dimensions, object oriented), which are “real-time discussions in which participants create names and descriptions for themselves and can create textual depictions of rooms and objects” (Walther & Parks, 2002), found that 93% of relationships initiated in the MOO incorporated other communication media as the relationship developed. Relationships that form in online

spaces and continue to progress towards a close tie relationship, are likely to follow similar trajectories of media incorporation. Between meeting online and meeting face-to-face (if such an event occurs), relational partners use email, chat, postal mail and telephone channels to communicate with one another. Walther and Parks (2002) have labeled relationships that develop online and then migrate offline as “mixed-mode” (p. 550).

While studying relationships that progress from online to offline provides important insight into the how media use might change as relationships develop, a relatively small number of users actually use the internet to initiate new relationships (Madden & Raine, 2006). Moreover, this approach does not address the much more common phenomena of relationships developing offline and then migrating online, or of relationships that are being developed and maintained simultaneously through multiple media. In other words, it does not account for the multimodality that characterizes everyday life. Because online and offline are not separate spheres of interaction, what happens via technology can be, and often is, entirely intertwined with what happens offline (Baym, 2009; Baym, Zhang, & Lin, 2004; Baym, Zhang, Kunkel, Ledbetter, & Lin, 2007; Parks, 2009; Walther & Parks, 2002). Thus, in order to avoid reifying the false binary between offline and online worlds, this study examines how students incorporate communication technologies into their personal relationships, regardless of how they first met.

Multimodality. Recently, research has begun to account for the multimodal nature of everyday life by examining how communication occurs across multiple media. Research about the value of CMC in relationships with offline social ties has found that email is often used to support and maintain relationships (Stafford, et. al., 1999), especially long-distance friendship (Chen, Boase, & Wellman, 2002; Quan-Haase, Wellman, Witte, & Hampton, 2002).

Additionally, the internet use has been shown to be equivalent to telephone use in personal relationships (Baym et al., 2004; Dimmick, Kline, & Stafford, 2000; Ledbetter, 2008; Flanagin & Metzger, 2001; Stafford et al., 1999) and that the principal reason people send e-mail messages to others is to maintain interpersonal relationships formed offline (Hampton & Wellman, 2003; Howard, Rainie, & Jones, 2001; McKenna & Bargh, 2000; Stafford et al., 1999).

Baym and colleagues have studied the extent to which college students incorporated internet communication technologies into maintaining their already existing social circles. They found that the majority of the students' interpersonal communication online was with people with whom they also communicated with via the telephone or face-to-face (Baym et al., 2004). They found that the percentage of communication conducted face-to-face, on the telephone and via internet technologies did not affect relationship satisfaction or closeness (Baym et al., 2007). While online interaction was perceived as slightly lower quality than telephone and face-to-face interaction, the difference was very small. Relationship type was a much stronger predictor of interaction quality; people in close relationships had higher quality interactions regardless of the medium through which they interacted (Baym et al., 2007). Media use and face-to-face communication were also positively correlated, such that the more students reported using the internet to maintain their relationships, the more likely they were to also be engaged in face-to-face and telephone conversations. Finally, the more intimate the students' relationships were, the more likely they were to use face-to-face and telephone calls.

As these studies indicate, most relationships are characterized by *media multiplexity*, which means that individuals conduct relational communication through multiple media and people with stronger ties use more media to communicate with one another (Haythornthwaite,

2002, 2005). Hathornthwaite (2005) argues that weak tie relationships rely on passive interaction opportunities whereas strong tie relationships employ multiple communication media and proactively seek person-to-person communication. Although the concept of ‘tie strength’ stems from sociology, Baym and colleagues (Baym, Larson, Ledbetter, McCudden, & Milner, 2009; Baym & Ledbetter, 2009) argue that ‘ties’ can be re-conceptualized in terms of relational development, a construct that better fits within the context of communication studies. Baym and Ledbetter (2009) found that relational development was not only positively correlated with the number of media used, but that the number of communication media used predicted relational development above and beyond other relationship level variables (e.g., Last.fm friendship length, where they met, geographic location, shared musical taste).

It seems that people can use PCTs in ways that conform to their personal and relational needs, within the bounds of the medium’s affordances (Hutchby, 2001), the consequence of which is often the development of new patterns of interpersonal interaction (Katz & Aakhus, 2002). For example, Licoppe (2004) argues that mobile technologies, especially text messages, allow users to maintain a sense of constant connection, even when physically separated. This communication pattern, which Licoppe (2004) calls the “connected mode,” is hallmarked by texts and calls that are short, but frequent, thus enabling and reaffirming feelings of connection. Ling and Yttri (2002) have also documented new forms of mediated interpersonal interaction. They argue that mobile technologies enable communication en-route: thus plans that have already been made and are in progress can easily be changed if all parties have access to a mobile device. The ability to change plans spontaneously or coordinate location at a bar, they called micro-coordination. Thus, the combination of PCT affordances and emergent uses of

these technologies in romantic/sexual relationships creates an environment where mediated communication supplements, and may even increase offline interaction.

While these studies provide valuable insight into how PCTs are incorporated into relationships, they provide little information about PCT use in romantic and/or sexual relationships. Research in the area of romantic/sexual relationships and PCTs has focused primarily on online dating (e.g., Ellison, Heino, & Gibbs, 2006; Gibbs, Ellison, & Heino, 2006; Hall, Park, Song, & Cody, 2010; Hancock & Toma, 2009; Toma, Hancock, & Ellison, 2008; Tong & Walther, 2010; Whitty & Carr, 2006) or on naturally formed relationships initiated online that later migrate offline (McKenna et al., 2002; Parks & Floyd, 1996; Parks & Roberts, 1998). However, recent studies have examined how young adults are incorporating multiple PCTs into their courtship rituals (e.g. Gershon, 2010a, 2010b; Pascoe, 2009).

Research indicates that young adults are using texting, phoning, Facebook chat, Facebook wall post, Facebook messages, instant messaging (Gershon, 2010a; Pascoe, 2009) and email (Gershon, 2010a) in their romantic/sexual relationships. According to Pascoe (2009), while teens are not necessarily meeting strangers online, they are using internet technologies to develop relationships with friends of friends or with people they have only briefly met in person. After an initial face-to-face meeting, teens often use social network sites or instant messaging as a way to get to know the object of their affection better.

Sims (2007) found that in the early stages of romantic relationships teens preferred to use asynchronous forms of communication, such as private messages and posts on social network sites or text messaging, because, he argued, they allow for slower and more controlled relationship development. If the relationships continued to grow, teens moved into other forms of communication. When in committed monogamous relationships, teens frequently call and

text one another (Pascoe, 2009). New technologies also allow teens to have more control over their private information: for example, text messaging allowed teens to communicate with romantic partners without their parents overhearing.

While media switching is seen as a marker of relational development (Gershon, 2010a, 2010b; Pascoe, 2009), patterns of new media use were not solidified enough in these studies to make definitive claims about the order of media use. However, one study linked phone calling to increased levels of relational certainty, love and commitment (Jin & Peña, 2010). They found that participants who reported greater frequency of or longer phone calls were less uncertain about their relationship and had more love and commitment. However, texting was not associated with relational uncertainty, love or commitment. While these studies indicate that media use can and often does define different stages of relational development, which media are associated with relational seriousness is not clear. Thus the following research question is posed:

RQ2: What patterns of PCT use are present in college students' romantic and/or sexual relationships across types of relational development?

Theorizing PCT use in romantic relationships. One study that gives insight into how and why relational partners are employing PCTs in romantic/sexual relationships is Sarch's (1993) examination of telephone use in dating relationships. Sarch interviewed 25 women about how they made sense of telephone use within their romantic and/or sexual relationships. While the use of the phone, did allow the majority of Sarch's participants to feel emboldened in their relationships, likely because of the reduced social cues the medium affords, this was only true when they had control over its use. When they were "waiting for his phone call," the women reported high feelings of anxiety, especially if they were uncertain about how the other felt about them, which was especially true at the beginning of relationships (Sarch, 1993, p. 134).

Although Sarch (1993) did not explicitly make this connection, her examples indicate that women who had high relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999) were guarded in their use of the phone and often consciously tried to avoid appearing clingy or pushy by calling too often. Relational uncertainty is the “degree of confidence people have in their perceptions of involvement in an interpersonal relationship” (Knobloch, Satterlee, & DiDomenico, 2010, p. 3). It encompasses three sources of uncertainty: self, partner and relationship. Self uncertainty refers to people’s feelings about their own commitment in the relationship (“How do I feel about this relationship?”). Partner uncertainty refers to doubts people experience about their partner’s commitment to or feelings about the relationship (“How does my partner feel about this relationship?”). Finally, relationship uncertainty is the doubt people experience about the relationship itself (“How certain am I about the status of this relationship?”) (Knobloch et al., 2010; Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). Sarch’s work implies that the use of the phone within the context of a romantic relationship was a reflection of how secure the women felt in that relationship. In this way, telephone use was a gauge of relational security. Women who were secure in their relationship found phone use to be unproblematic, while those who were more uncertain of their relational status were more concerned with determining the appropriate norms for phone use.

Additionally, Knobloch (2006) found that individuals who simulated leaving a date-request message on their romantic partner’s voicemail communicated less fluently when they were unsure about the status of their relationship. While uncertainty does shape facets of communication, what is less clear is how it might help explain the communication technology choice. It stands to reason that people may attempt to seek out information, especially potentially face threatening relational information, through mediated channels (O’Sullivan,

2000). People may seek to increase the equivocality of the information-seeking messages by using a leaner medium (O'Sullivan, 2000). By engaging in strategic ambiguity, people can attempt to regulate their self-presentation in ways that "maximizes rewards and minimize costs" (O'Sullivan, 2000, p. 411).

While O'Sullivan (2000) does not explicitly make this connection, his understanding of impression management is similar to face (Goffman, 1967). Face is the identity that individuals enact while interaction with others (Goffman, 1967). Politeness theory distinguished two types of face: positive and negative. Positive face is the desire to be admired, respected, or liked. Negative face is the desire for autonomy, independence and non-imposition (Brown & Levinson, 1987). Brown and Levinson (1987) argued that people must weigh their desire to accomplish goals against their desire to maintain their own and others' face. While individuals attempt to project and maintain desired identities during everyday interactions, "the management of face is particularly relevant to the formation and erosion of interpersonal relationships" (Cupach & Metts, 1994, p. 15). Indeed, during the initial stages of courtship, individuals are particularly concerned with the impression they are making (Kunkel, Wilson, Olufowote, & Robson, 2003).

In this vein, identity implications theory (IIT) (Wilson, Aleman, & Leatham, 1998; Kunkel et al., 2003; Wilson & Kunkel, 2000; Wilson, Kunkel, Robson, Olufowote, & Soliz, 2009) proposes that, unlike politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987), which attempted to explain people's behavior across cultures and relationship types, context makes face threats more or less germane to any given situation (Kunkel et al., 2003; Wilson, Kunkel, Robson, Olufowote, & Soliz, 2009). Like politeness theory, IIT assumes that face is comprised of two basic needs: the desire for approval (positive face) and the desire to maintain autonomy (negative face). Research about IIT has discovered a group of face threats that are especially relevant to initiating

and maintaining romantic relationships: *pressuring a partner to comply* (threat to other's negative face), *limiting own freedom* (threat to own negative face), *showing dislike for the other* (threat to other's positive face), *incurring dislike from the other*, *appearing too forward* and *appearing overly dependent* (all threats to own positive face). In a study that combined IIT and uncertainty reduction theory, Knobloch et al. (2010) found that individuals who were high in uncertainty were especially concerned about looking pushy and needy. Given college students use of PCT in romantic relationship development, they might be able to employ PCTs in ways that allow them to more successfully navigate these face threats.

In fact, O'Sullivan (2000) found that college students preferred mediated channels when a partner's—and especially their own—face was threatened. He argues that individuals recognized that the affordances of mediated communication could help minimize the loss of face that occurs when individuals are associated with “embarrassing or unattractive information” (p. 423). The increased interactional control enabled by mediated channels, including control over the “timing, duration and the nature of information exchanged” (O'Sullivan, 2000, p. 412), helps interaction participants to better shape the impressions others form of them.

According to Pascoe (2009), teens also use the affordances of PCTs to develop relationships in ways that feel safer than face-to-face. To this end, teens would use the asynchronous nature of communication technologies to spend extra time composing messages that showed they were only casually interested. They also relied on asynchronous media to avoid putting themselves in a position where they might say or do something embarrassing (Pascoe, 2009). This type of “controlled casualness” (Sims, 2007) allowed teens to gauge the interest of the other party without making themselves overly vulnerable. This suggests that young adults might be especially attuned to navigating PCTs in their romantic/sexual

relationships in ways that best allow them to present themselves in a favorable light. Because any one, or a combination, of these theoretical frameworks might be useful in explaining PCT use in college student romantic and/or sexual relationships, the following broad research question is posed:

RQ3: What reasons do students give for using different PCTs in their romantic/sexual relationships?

Media symbolism. A channel's symbolic meaning involves the content of the message sent and the use of the channel above and beyond the content of the verbal or nonverbal message (Trevino et al., 1987). Trevino et al. (1987) drew on structural symbolic interactionism (Stryker & Statham, 1985), to argue that technology users both draw from established meaning and create new rich meanings around PCT use. Accordingly, they held that the symbolic meanings of some media are fixed within a given social system, while others are in flux. Fulk (1992), however, argued that symbolic features are not fixed attributes of PCTs. For Fulk (1992), the symbolic meanings of different media "may well arise, be sustained, and evolve through an on-going process of joint sense-making within bounded social systems" (p. 556). Similarly, Gershon (2010a, 2010b) held that people develop media ideologies, or beliefs about how "the medium affects or should affect the message." These ideologies, Gershon (2010b) argues are "multiple, competing, contradictory" and socially constructed (p. 391). However, while students in Gershon's (2010a) sample assumed that their personal media ideologies were shared, she argues that their media ideologies were multiple. This was especially true for the social practices surrounding the use of newer technologies, like Facebook (Gershon, 2010a, 2010b). However, practices for older PCTs, like the telephone and text messaging, were generally agreed upon (Gershon, 2010a, 2010b). Thus, while the symbolic meanings of PCTs might become

sedimented, they are not static. As new media are developed, their meanings and the meanings of other, older technologies (e.g., phone calls or letter writing) must be collectively negotiated or re-negotiated within a bounded social group.

Part of this negotiation process involves learning what is appropriate PCT use. We learn what is appropriate by interacting with others and watching others' interactions (Fulk, 1992). Because we are influenced by the behavior of peers, over time this social influence will produce "a similar pattern of media attitudes and use behavior within groups" (Fulk, Steinfeld, Schmitz, & Power, 1987, p. 542). Gershon (2010a) calls this patterned behavior, *idioms of practice*. As she describes, people sort out how to use PCTs and come to agree about their use by asking for advice and sharing stories about media use in their relationships.

Of importance to this process are the affordances of (Hutchby, 2001) and meaning attached to older technologies relative to the new technologies (Bolter & Grusin, 1999). Therefore, the practices and meanings for new PCTs are always connected to and influenced by the use of (Dimmick et al., 2000) and meaning (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) for older PCTs. In order to understand people's expectations for media use, one also has to understand the possible alternatives (Bolter & Grusin, 1999), for example flirting via text message versus, or in addition to, flirting via Facebook wall posts (Gershon, 2010a).

In addition to medium used, message characteristics also become important to meaning construction in mediated environments. As Walther (2006) noted in his review of nonverbal communication research in online environments, virtually all major theoretical perspectives about online communication assume that the relative lack of nonverbal cues is what differentiates CMC from other media. However, media not only transmit content meaning, the ways in which they are used also convey symbolic meaning.

According to Walther's (1996) social information processing theory, when people are operating in mediated environments with reduced social cues, they need more time to form impressions of others that are as detailed as those formed through face-to-face communication. Research has demonstrated that that people switch from using traditional nonverbal cues (e.g., eye gaze, body posture, hand gestures, etc.) to determine the relational meaning of messages in person to verbal cues in online chat conversations (Walther, Loh, & Granka, 2005). In online mediated communication, message characteristics, such as spelling errors (Lea & Spears, 1992; Ellison et al., 2006), the amount of time lag between sending and receiving a message (Walther & Tidwell, 1995), time of day message was sent (Ellison et al., 2006) and frequency of contact (Gershon, 2010) help users make inferences about message meaning that goes beyond content meaning. Gershon (2010) argued that while there are multiple ways PCT affordances might enable or constrain behavior, people's media ideologies "determine what specific aspect of how a medium affects communication will matter" (p. 50). While previous research has focused on CMC, it is reasonable to assume that people are also making meaning from verbal or temporal cues embedded into text messages, phone calls, or communication through Facebook.

As college students are forerunners of new communication technology use, they are actively involved in negotiating and shaping their own norms for and meanings associated with PCT use. Because, within the framework of symbolic interactionism (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) anything can be considered a symbol, and thus, a carrier of meaning, it is appropriate to investigate the meanings attached to PCT use within the context of college students' romantic/sexual relationships. One way we can study the meanings college students are attaching to medium use in their romantic/sexual relationships is by examining how they talk

about the process of forming these types of relationships. Therefore, the following research question is posed:

RQ4: What meanings do college students attach to PCT use in romantic and/or sexual relationships?

Chapter Two: Methodology

In order to address the four research questions posed in chapter one, a mixed method, sequential exploratory design (Creswell, 2009) was employed. A sequential exploratory design collects data in two phases, the first qualitative and the second quantitative. A mixed method approach allows for both the examination of the meanings participants attach to PCT use in romantic relationships in their own words and for investigating insights gained from the qualitative analysis in a larger sample (Creswell, 2009). Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007, p. 5) define mixed methods research as follows:

Mixed methods research is a research design with philosophical assumptions as well as methods of inquiry. As a methodology, it involves philosophical assumptions that guide the direction of the collection and analysis of data and the mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches in many phases in the research process. As a method, it focuses on collecting, analyzing and mixing both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies. Its central premise is that the use of quantitative and qualitative approaches in combination provides a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone.

They do not argue that mixed methods will enable a researcher to better represent an existing external reality. Instead they acknowledge, in true pragmatist form, that we will never be able to access ‘true reality,’ so trying to measure ‘it’ is a fruitless effort. In this way, Creswell and Plano-Clark (2007) are very much in line with Denzin and Lincoln’s (1994) argument that employing multiple methods can be seen as “an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question. [...] Triangulation is not a tool or strategy of validation, but an alternative to validation. The combination of multiple methods, empirical materials, perspectives

and observers in a single study is best understood, then, as a strategy that adds rigor, breadth, and depth to any investigation” (p. 2). All methods of data collection have strengths and limitations. However, integrating multiple methods into a research project can balance out some of the disadvantages of certain methods (Jick, 1979; Creswell, Plano Clark, Gutman, & Hanson, 2003).

Type of Mixed Methods Design

There are six types of mixed methods research designs identified in the literature (Creswell, 2009). They can be distinguished by their temporal structure, weighting of the qualitative and quantitative elements, and strategies for mixing the data. The research design selected to frame this study was the sequential exploratory, with the qualitative component occurring before the quantitative component. This data collection strategy is appropriate to employ when the researcher wants to test elements of an emergent theory resulting from the grounded theory analysis that will take place in the qualitative phase (Morgan, 1998, as cited in Creswell, 2009), which is the overarching goal of this project. Below is a visual illustration of this design structure (Cresswell, 2009).

Figure 1: Sequential Exploratory Design



The methodological weight, or the strategies the researcher chose to emphasize (Creswell, 2009), was on the qualitative methods. In Figure 1, these considerations are denoted through the use of arrows that indicated the progression of research and by capitalizing QUAL because it is of primary importance. Finally, these data were analyzed separately, but were integrated by connecting the analysis conducted in the qualitative phase to the quantitative phase (Creswell, 2009).

Study Phases

The first phase of this research was a qualitative exploration of meanings surround PCT use through semi-structured interviews with students at a large Midwestern university. The purpose of this phase of data collection was to qualitatively construct a ‘theory’ (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) that explains the relationships between constructs that are present in participants’ talk about how PCTs are negotiated in romantic and/or sexual relationships.

Then, a survey was developed based upon the patterns of PCT use developed through the qualitative analysis. This quantitative phase helped articulate the relationship(s) between the constructs identified in phase one and assessed the generalizability of those constructs. Quantitative research questions/hypotheses were formulated after the completion of the initial qualitative phase. Qualitative data were collected before quantitative data because the variables and constructs that underlie the role of PCTs in romantic relationships are largely unstudied and no coherent map of relationships between constructs related to relational communication, technology and relationship development was available. The qualitative methods are described in this chapter while the quantitative measure is described in chapter four.

This discussion begins by addressing the pilot study conducted to develop and refine interviewing and analysis procedures. Following this discussion is a description of the methodology employed in addressing the four research questions posed in the main study. In both studies, college students at a large Midwestern university were interviewed about their experiences with, thoughts about, and understandings of how to use PCTs in romantic and/or sexual relationships. The complexity involved in understanding how social groups make sense of using communication technologies in their everyday lives and the ways in which this sense-

making process is affected by social context is best achieved by a qualitative, open-ended approach.

Pilot Study

The pilot study further developed and refined the interview questions to be used in the main project. This preliminary data collection provided insights into how the college dating scene functions, terms college students use to describe their romantic/sexual relationships, and experiences college students had when using communication technologies to initiate, escalate, or sustain a romantic and/or sexual relationship. This grounded the analysis in the actual reported romantic and/or sexual behaviors of students at a large Midwestern university as they understood and engaged in them.

Participants. Participants for the pilot study were nine undergraduates enrolled in communication studies classes at a large Midwestern university. Although collecting data from a convenience sample limits the generalizability of the findings, college students, given their status as forerunners and frequent users of PCTs (Lenhart et al., 2010; Zickuhr, 2011), represent a particularly appropriate sample through which to examine the integration of PCTs into developing relationships. For the pilot study, the original stipulation was that participants be involved in a romantic and/or sexual relationship at the time of the interview. Individuals could participate if they could identify a person with whom they have had at least one interaction, plan to interact with in the future, and see the potential for a romantic and/or sexual relationship to develop. This could include a person they met last week with whom they have interacted with only briefly, but plan to interact with again, a person with whom they engage in sexual intercourse, but don't have strong feelings for, or a monogamous romantic partner of several

years, thus spanning the stages of relational development proposed by Knapp and Vangelisti (2005).

However, after conducting three interviews, it became clear that individuals who were more casually seeking a romantic partner or who were looking for uncommitted sexual intercourse were not likely to volunteer to be interviewed in response to this, admittedly a bit confusing, recruitment statement. Therefore, this requirement was dropped for subsequent participants. In order to ensure the normative courtship practices of college students were captured, participants were required to be American. While international students who have lived or gone to university in America have likely adapted to some of the courtship rituals common to the studied campus, it was more parsimonious to simply focus on students who are steeped in common cultural values and norms. In order to ensure each participant was American they were asked, before beginning the interview, about their student status. If s/he reported being an international student they were not interviewed but were still granted course/extra credit. Finally, although technology use in relationships is a vital part of this study, this criterion was not imposed upon participants. Because this project examined the everyday communicative practices of people in romantic and/or sexual relationships, excluding those who might not consider themselves 'technology users' would be unwise. Those who do not consider themselves technologically inclined might opt out of participation. Being inclusive in participant recruitment provided a sense of the extent of PCT use in romantic and/or sexual relationships.

Participants were recruited in three ways. First, three undergraduate research assistants were asked to recommend other undergraduates they thought might be interested in talking with me about the subject of communication technology use in romantic and/or sexual relationship. This yielded four female interviewees. Second, participants were recruited by offering course

credit to several lower-level communication studies classes in exchange for their participation. This yielded three male interviewees. Finally, two male students who had previously been my students heard about the project and contacted me to set up an interview. In total, I interviewed four women (*Age* = 20, range 19-22) and five men (*Age* = 20.8, range 19-23). Participants were primarily white (78%, *N* = 7). One was African-American and one was East Asian.

Procedures. All participants were provided, and asked to sign, an informed consent statement, approved by the university's Internal Review Board, that reassured them of confidentiality and explained the objectives of this research project. Then, they were asked to complete a short demographic survey (see Appendix B) that included questions about their relational history and use of communication technologies. After completing these two steps, participants' oral consent for audiorecording of the interviews was requested. All provided that consent. Finally, I conducted semi-structured interviews (see Appendix C for protocol).

Semi-structured interviewing was chosen as the appropriate method for data collection because it provides an opportunity for an in-depth inquiry of participant beliefs and attitudes in a way that would not be possible with survey or focus group methodology (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Also, by allowing participants to help shape the direction of the interview (i.e., allowing for tangents), it allows for the possibility of discovering other areas of interest or thematic categories (Johnson, 2001) that could be used in developing interview and analysis procedures for the main project. Finally, an interview situation places emphasis on the interaction of the participant and the interviewer, thus allowing the interviewer to more readily work to create a relationship with the interviewee (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The ability to build rapport with the participant was vital to having meaningful and honest conversations about their romantic and sexual relationships.

In addition to being semi-structured, the interviews were also in-depth. This approach, in the words of Goffman (1989), helped reach the goal of “subjecting yourself...and your own social situation, to the set of contingencies that play upon a set of individuals, so that you can physically and ecologically penetrate their circle of response to their social situation, their work situation, or their ethnic situation” (p. 125). Thus, conducting interviews enabled me to learn more about the perceptions and meanings my participants have about incorporating technologies into romantic and/or sexual relationships and to explore the extent to which my own understanding of how this phenomenon works is shared by my participants (Johnson, 2001).

Once the interview was conducted and audiotaped, the digital recordings were stored on my personal computer. Four research assistants, who signed a privacy contract and were trained in transcription procedures prior to being the transcription, and I transcribed the interviews. Each interview was transcribed using the following process. In addition to the words spoken, the transcripts include a few paralinguistic features that show how words were spoken. For example: pauses are indicated by full stops, the lengthening of words and the addition of vocal fillers was denoted by phonetic spelling (e.g., okaaaay, oh, umm, hmmm) and laughter was also noted. This transcription method is a fusion of those employed by Coupland and Coupland (1998) and Seale and Silverman (1997), as described in Wetherell, Taylor and Yates (2001). Greater transcription detail was unnecessary given the focus on emergent themes within participants’ language. Transcript reliability and accuracy was established by repeatedly listening to the audio-taped interviews and correcting the transcripts as needed.

A qualitative grounded theory approach, specifically a constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2000; Glaser, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), was employed to analyze the interview data. Each transcript was treated as a unit of analysis and was carefully reviewed for salient

patterns and recurrent themes with the goal of analyzing the interviews in order to make claims about the knowledge and belief structures underlying the participants' talk (Potter & Wetherell, 1995). If a topic, phrase, or word was found in more than one transcript, it was recorded as a theme.

Pilot findings. The participants in this pilot study used these terms when talking about romantic and/or sexual relationships with their peers: Dating, hooking up, talking to, and hanging out. The students I spoke with indicated that there is a clear difference between dating and hooking up. Dating can refer to a formal outing, which is planned and occurs in a public space. However, the students I spoke with did not report going on "dates" until after they had already become exclusive with their partners. Dating was also used interchangeably with being in a long-term relationship; so two people were dating if they were exclusive. However, none of these respondents reported either asking someone out or being asked out on an official date.

Hooking up, on the other hand, is a relatively ambiguous term that can be used to describe a sexual interaction, with behavior ranging from kissing to sexual intercourse, between two partners who are not in a committed romantic relationship with each other. It was unclear before the pilot interviews if hooking up was as prevalent on the campus of study as it had been reported to be on other campuses (Bogle, 2008; Glenn & Marquardt, 2001; Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000). While not a generalizable measure of the occurrence of hooking up, the pilot interviews did indicate that the participants perceived hooking up as very common on this college campus and all had engaged in the practice at one time or another. Because of participants' delineation of hooking up and because recent reports estimate that up to 81% of college students have participated in a hookup (Lambert, Kahn, & Apple, 2003; Paul & Hayes, 2002; Paul, McManus, & Hayes, 2000), one

goal of the main project was to identify and distinguish between young adults' understandings of what it means to hookup versus their understandings of what it means to develop romantic relationships.

In addition to hooking up and dating, my participants also identified talking to and hanging out as terms commonly used to describe different stages of early romantic relationship development. These terms have been identified in other projects (Banker, Kaestle, & Allen, 2010; Bogle, 2008; Pascoe, 2009) as ways young adults talk about beginning romantic relationships. The participants were able to describe their basic understandings of each term. Talking to means that the person is interested in pursuing a relationship with the other person, but does not imply exclusivity. Hanging out is a step beyond talking to, but still does not involve full-on dating. These terms denote identifiable, if somewhat ambiguous, stages of relationship initiation. These terms served as starting points for identifying and defining the terms college students are using to talk about their romantic and sexual entanglements in the main study.

Participants were also queried about the types of PCTs they used within talking to, hanging out, dating or hooking up relationships. Students reported using text messaging, phone calling, Facebook wall posts, Facebook messaging, Facebook chat, email and instant messaging with their potential/current romantic/sexual partners. They spoke most often about sending texts and reported that they would only very rarely use email or instant messaging to contact a romantic/sexual partner. Although they were asked about their use of Twitter, none reported that they would pursue a person they were romantically or sexually interested in through this medium.

According to these students, it is appropriate to meet potential romantic or hookup partners offline and then pursue the relationship further online or via texting. None of the

participants I spoke with felt comfortable meeting someone online, although two acknowledged that in the future, when they no longer have the ready access to potential partners that a college campus affords, that they might consider trying online dating. In contacting a potential romantic partner, it is acceptable to send a text message or make a short phone call. In less developed relationships (e.g., talking to, hanging out and hooking up) long phone calls without purpose were seen as inappropriate and potentially face threatening. However, once relationships became more developed participants, reported feeling free to call or text.

These data gave insight into the types of PCTs used in romantic and/or sexual relationships by university students that deserved further examination in the main study and helped guide the framing of open-ended questions for the main study. They also established the extent to which these participants draw clear distinctions between romantic relationships with long-term goals and short-term sexual or hookup relationships. These data were used to help focus on the PCTs participants were most likely to use in their romantic/sexual relationships: text messaging, phone calling, Facebook wall posts, Facebook messaging, Facebook chat, email and instant messaging. The pilot study solidified the usefulness of conducting in-depth interviews as a way to uncover the motivations for and meanings attached to communication technology use. While these findings are useful, the sample from which these conclusions were drawn was too small to declare them conclusive.

Based on the pilot, I revised the protocol for the main study to include probes for talking to, hanging out, dating and hooking up. If participants were unclear about a question or required more explanation in order to understand a question asked in the pilot, then it was re-worded for the final protocol. While the majority of the questions from the original protocol were retained, the wording was changed based upon the participants' responses. Because the changes to the

protocol from the pilot study to the main study were primarily organizational, the pilot data was included in the over-all analysis.

Main Study Phase 1: Qualitative Interviews

Participants. Participants recruited specifically for the main study were 28 students enrolled in communication courses at a large Midwestern university. They were offered extra credit in their respective courses in exchange for completing an interview that ran approximately one hour. Participants were 60.7% male ($N = 17$) and 39.3% female ($N = 11$), and were an average of 20.8 years old (female $Mage = 19.2$, Range = 19 - 25; male $Mage = 20.5$, Range = 19 - 24). Participants were primarily white (86%, $N = 24$). Two were African-American (7%) and two were Hispanic (7%).

When coupled with the pilot study, there were 37 participants total. Together, participants were 59.5% male ($N = 22$) and 40.5% female ($N = 15$), and were an average of 20.7 years old (female $Mage = 20.3$, Range = 19 - 25; male $Mage = 21.0$, Range = 19 - 24). Participants were primarily white (84%, $N = 31$). Three were African-American (8%), two were Hispanic (7%) and one was East Asian (see Table 1).

Table 1: Participants' Demographic Information and Pseudonyms

Name	Sex	Age	Year in School	Race	Social Network Sites Used
Karen	F	22	Senior	White	Facebook
Emma	F	19	Sophomore	White	Facebook
Ellen	F	20	Sophomore	White	Facebook
Rae	F	19	Sophomore	White	Facebook
Mary	F	25	Senior	Hispanic	Myspace, Facebook
Tanya	F	19	Sophomore	White	Facebook
Becca	F	20	Junior	White	Facebook
Anna	F	20	Junior	White	Facebook
Lindy	F	20	Junior	White	Facebook
Kay	F	20	Senior	White	Facebook
Chelsea	F	20	Sophomore	White	Facebook

Kate	F	21	Senior	White	Facebook
Susie	F	19	Freshman	White	Facebook
Bella	F	21	Junior	White	Facebook
Jane	F	19	Freshman	White	Facebook
Don	M	22	Senior	White	Facebook
Adam	M	20	Junior	White	Facebook
Rob	M	21	Sophomore	White	Facebook
Zack	M	20	Sophomore	White	Facebook
Ben	M	19	Freshman	White	Facebook
Matt	M	24	Senior	Hispanic	Facebook
Roger	M	20	Junior	White	Facebook
Finn	M	20	Junior	White	Facebook
Ron	M	21	Junior	White	Facebook
Kevin	M	24	Senior	White	Facebook
Jack	M	21	Senior	White	Facebook
Jim	M	22	Senior	White	Facebook
George	M	19	Sophomore	African-American	Facebook
Dan	M	20	Sophomore	African-American	Facebook
Jarrold	M	22	Senior	White	Facebook
Zeke	M	20	Sophomore	White	Facebook
Paul	M	22	Senior	White	Facebook
Bob	M	19	Sophomore	White	Facebook
Todd	M	19	Freshman	White	Facebook
Ross	M	21	Senior	White	Facebook
Mark	M	22	Senior	African-American	Facebook
Jason	M	23	Senior	Asian-American	Facebook

Note. To protect participant confidentiality all names are pseudonyms.

Procedures. As in the pilot study, all participants were provided, and asked to sign, an informed consent statement, approved by the university's Internal Review Board, that reassured them of their confidentiality and explained the objectives of this research project. Participants' consent was also secured for audiorecording of the interviews. Then, they were asked to complete a short demographic survey (see Appendix A) that included questions about their relational history and use of communication technologies.

In order to better understand how college students make sense of PCT use in romantic and/or sexual relationships, a series of semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted. The pilot study confirmed the utility of semi-structured interviews and was used to revise the protocol for the main study (see Appendix B). Although an interview protocol was constructed to provide consistency and help ensure that each interview covered important topic areas, the hope was that the interviews felt more like relaxed conversations and went beyond the boundaries created by the interview protocol. Because of my status as an instructor at the university, I took great pains to disassociate myself from my instructor image. While interviews were conducted on campus, they were not conducted in my office. This was an attempt to avoid using spaces that would automatically create additional power differentials between the participants and me. I also dressed casually and used very informal language when introducing the project. To create a more conversational feel, I opened the interviews by telling the participants a little about myself and about my relationship experiences and then asked them to tell me a bit about themselves.

During the interviews, participants were asked what they think about the college dating scene in general, to describe how they (or their friends) use PCTs in both their romantic and sexual relationships, to discuss which terms they use in describing their romantic and sexual relationships, which type of PCT were associated with which types of relationships, and their perceptions of appropriate PCT use in romantic and sexual relationships. While interviews did have some structure, the questions on the protocol were often rearranged spontaneously as determined by the talk of the interviewee. Similarly, follow-up and probing questions were often employed to encourage participants to continue talking about a tangential, but interesting, topic. These interviews ranged in length from 35 to 90 minutes, for a total of approximately 21.5 hours of recorded data.

Transcription. As in the pilot study, interviews were audiotaped and then transcribed with the aid of four undergraduate research assistants who were not aware of the participants' identity. Additionally, three interviews were transcribed by a transcription service that adhered to strict confidentiality guidelines. Transcription procedures were the same as those used for the pilot interviews. Like the pilot study, greater transcription detail was deemed unnecessary given the focus on themes within participants' language. Transcript accuracy was established by repeated listening to the audiotaped interviews while reading the transcripts to verify that all pertinent information was recorded.

Analysis Procedures. Like the pilot study, a constant comparative (Charmaz, 2000, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 1990) was employed to analyze the data. The process of constant comparison also "stimulates thought that leads to both descriptive and explanatory categories" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 341). Thus, as new insights were gained, the shape and direction of the research project was determined. This approach allowed for the refinement and development of additional coding categories, research questions and hypotheses as new information was gathered. The transcripts were carefully reviewed for salient patterns, recurrent themes and key concepts. Each time a new theme or concept was found it was written down and a new category was formed.

After working through all the transcripts, categories were compared and contrasted to ensure the best possible constructs remained. During this process the nine pilot study interviews were coded and re-coded as applicable and became part of the corpus of data reported in the main study results, bringing the total sample to 37 (see Table 1 for participants demographics and pseudonyms). Dedoose, a web-based, mixed methods software, was used to organize and code data. Two professors at UCLA, research psychologist Eli Lieber, Ph.D and anthropologist

Thomas Weisner, Ph.D, developed this software. To address concerns of confidentiality and privacy, Dedoose developers use SSL EV (Secure Sockets Layer Extended Validation) “the highest tier of encryption and validation offered on the internet. This protects your data while traveling on the internet so that only you and Dedoose have access to your precious data” (Dedoose, 2011). Thus, it provides a secure place to store data. Transcripts were stripped of all identifying information (e.g. any names or location mentioned during the course of the interview) before being uploaded.

Themes were looked for in single sentences, phrases, or in a series of statements. If a topic was present in more than one transcript, it was recorded as a theme. Constant comparative analysis was used to examine the data for statements and signs of behavior that are recurrent in the interviews throughout this study (Janesick, 1994). Once key themes were abstracted from the data, a comprehensive explanation of the relationships between the themes was developed (Charmaz, 2006). During this process, a colleague independently examined five randomly selected transcripts in order to offer a different perspective on the data analysis and to problematize the original interpretations of the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This resulted in discussions that informed analysis of the transcripts. In all, four themes and one pattern were identified. The themes will be detailed in the next chapter. When describing, defining, and explaining these themes and this pattern in the next chapter, all but one interviewee is quoted. The interviewee (Dan) was especially unforthcoming with his responses. While he confirmed patterns found in the talk of other participants, his responses were generally very short.

In summary, this chapter has outlined the methodologies employed to examine college students’ use of PCTs and the meanings they attach to that use in their romantic/sexual relationships. This project employs a sequential exploratory design (Cresswell, 2009) that

enables the findings of the qualitative analysis to be generalized to a larger population. The findings of the qualitative analysis are presented in the next chapter. After these results are discussed, the constructs used to develop the survey used in the second quantitative phase of the study are outlined. Additional discussion of the survey content and results is found in chapter four.

Chapter Three: Qualitative Results

This chapter presents the results of the qualitative portion of this study. It addresses and is organized around RQ1-RQ4. It starts with findings regarding the terms college students use to talk about their romantic/sexual relationships (RQ1) and how PCT use is patterned across levels of relationship development (RQ2). It concludes with the data that addresses the reasons participants' give for incorporating different PCTs at different points in relationships (RQ3) and the meanings they associate with medium use (RQ4). In answer to these research questions, four themes and one pattern were identified (see Table 2 for a summary).

Table 2: Number (Percent) of Interviews Containing Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme	Number of Interviews (%)
Relational microtypes	Talking to	37 (100%)
	Hanging out	37 (100%)
	Dating	37 (100%)
	Hooking up	37 (100%)
Communicative acts	Micro-coordination	30 (81.1%)
	Arranging plans	31 (83.8%)
	Just chatting	29 (78.4%)
	Flirting	19 (51.4%)
	Long conversation	17 (45.9%)
Underlying motivations	Relational Uncertainty	34 (91.9%)
	Facework	33 (89.2%)
	Media affordances:	
	Reduced social cues	28 (75.7%)
	Perceived privacy	16 (43.2%)
	Temporal structure	32 (86.5%)
	Mobility	19 (59.4%)
Symbolic meaning of media use	Symbolic meaning of media choice	30 (81.1%)
	Symbolic meaning of message characteristics:	
	Message length	34 (91.9%)
	Response lag	29 (78.4%)
	Message frequency	31 (83.8%)
	Time of day	33 (89.2%)

Defining Terms

This section addresses the following research question:

RQ1: What terms are college students using to describe their romantic and/or sexual relationships?

The interview data offered insight into the ways in which college students are negotiating PCT use in their romantic and/or sexual relationships. In answer to RQ1, iterative, thematic analysis of the interviews revealed one primary theme – relational microtypes – which subsumes the four primary terms that they use to describe their romantic/sexual relationships: talking to, hanging out, dating and hooking up (for summary, see Appendix E).

Microtypes: Talking to, hanging out, dating and hooking up. The overarching theme that addresses RQ1 is relational microtypes. For the purposes of this analysis, microtypes are defined as types of relationships might occur with the broader stages identified by relationship scholars. While they do not clearly map onto the relational stages developed by scholars (e.g., Altman & Taylor, 1973, 1978; Knapp, 1978; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005; Levinger, 1983), they are meaningful types of relationships to college students, which also indicate varying levels of romantic relationship development. This theme encompasses four relational microtypes: *talking to*, *hanging out*, *dating* and *hooking up*. Participants identified these as terms commonly used to describe different stages of early romantic and/or sexual relationship development.

Talking to. According to the participants, talking to means an individual is interested in pursuing a relationship with another person, but for most it did not imply exclusivity. When asked to define talking to, Jane said, “it means to just be with him and texting him but you're still single. If you meet a new guy that’s cool. But you are starting to like them [the first person] and wanting to hang out with them.” Similarly, Kay said that talking to “means the potential of

dating is there but nothing is set in stone, not Facebook official. Just flirting and the potential to date is there.” Like Jane and Kay, Becca said:

Talking is like you have literally been having conversations day-to-day, like texting or calling if the guy is in to that. It’s established that you like each other and you are sort of testing the waters to see if you want to date or not.

Don agreed, he said that to him talking to meant:

If you’re talking to a girl, you’ve probably hooked up, but you’re not making plans around one another. You’re doing lots of texting, but you try to make it seem like you don’t one hundred percent care about her.

However, this stage, unlike hooking up, does come with a sense of limited commitment. When asked to define talking to, Adam said:

Talking to means more a relationship type thing. Because you’re talking to, you’re interested in talking to the person. Sex can just be purely sex. It doesn’t have to be complicated.

Ross, was a bit more elaborate in his definition of talking to. He said:

You’ve probably talked to her a few times and then you’ve really got to know her a little bit and you know there is a connection there and you’re trying to work towards it, so I would say you’re trying to work towards a relationship. Like it’s an intermediate between I know her and then we’re going out, it’s right in between.

Kate, agreed with Ross. She said:

I think talking to a guy is the stage like right before the relationship or right before dating, it’s like you meet them and you feel that fluttery whatever, and like when you first start flirting and they might have added you on Facebook and maybe you exchanged

numbers but talking to someone is like at the very beginning. Its like when people would ask me about [boyfriend] I would say yeah we're like talking because we didn't have that title yet, and that's basically what we were doing we would text all the time and then go out on dates and stuff. When my mom would ask so is he your boyfriend and I would tell her we were just talking, and then she would ask what we were talking about! I was like no mom that's not what I mean by talking and I tried to explain and she said, like, "Oooh, so you're dating?" and I was just like, "Yeah we'll go with that, mom."

For Ross and Kate, talking to refers to the initial stages of a relationship where a person has noticed a particularly attractive other and is attempting to pursue a more intimate relationship. In summary, talking to occurs after initial face-to-face contact between mutually attracted parties. If two people are talking to each other, there is an unspoken acknowledgement that they are engaging in behaviors that could lead to a monogamous romantic relationship.

Hanging out. According to participants, hanging out is more amorphous than talking to. For these college students, the meaning of hanging out was heavily dependent upon relational context. As such, it could refer to spending time with a platonic friend or as a step beyond talking to, depending upon the intentions of the parties involved. Not all were convinced that hanging out was an identifiable type of early romantic relationship, but the majority ($N = 22$, out of 37) concluded that it was. For example, Mark said:

You could be using it [the term hanging out] to feel her out, hanging out to get to know her better, but then you could also just be hanging out because we're buddies. We're just friends, not looking to take it to the next level. So it just depends on what your motive is.

Students in this sample also understood hanging out as a term that takes on additional meaning dependent upon relationship progression. George said:

George: Hanging out is nothing...unless you were already talking to them. Because you hang with all of your friends.

Interviewer: OK, sure. So in the progression of talking to, what would it mean?

George: It still means the same thing, because you're still not at the dating stage. So it doesn't really become anything until then, because you can hang out with somebody as much as you want, even if you're just talking to them. Unless there's some sort of progression towards something sexual or serious dating, then it's just that you're hanging out with them.

Like Mark and George, Rae was also not convinced that hanging out was an identifiable stage of early romantic relationship development. She said:

For me it's really hard to distinguish because most of my friends are guys. I guess there's a difference between hanging out with guys and being one of the guys and hanging out with the guys and like, romantically seeing each other, but not really considered a date because you're not really going anywhere. And I would consider a date going out somewhere together.

Similarly, Adam said, "Hanging out I'd say is more like a friend thing. If you're just hanging out, there's no obligation." When asked if he thought hanging out was a stage of relationship development, Adam replied, "A relationship could stem from it, but it's an everyday thing."

Many of the participants, including those who thought that hanging out was a specific type of romantic relationship, also alluded to the ambiguity of hanging out. Chelsea said:

Not many guys like going on dates at first, so they like hanging out with you and then they'll ask you out on a date. So probably after you've set like, "Hey we're more than friends, but we're just getting there" sort of thing.

Some people reported using this ambiguity to their advantage. Matt said:

I guess it would be like that step before the date type thing. So instead of maybe like doing the dinner or going to a movie maybe you hang out at a bar or you hang out at a party or come over to watch a movie with some friends. Like not a big group of friends but maybe like 4 or 5, a very small intimate group where you can still get to know them but it's still safe and it's not considered the date part yet.

Asking a person you are romantically interested in to 'hang out' was a way to spend time getting to know the person informally without having to ask the other out on a date. However, for 22 of 37 the participants, hanging out was a step beyond talking to, but still did not involve full on dating. Jarrod said:

Hanging out would probably be like having sex and like texting, so its probably like talking to but with sex probably, its maybe a little more serious.

When asked to define hanging out Anna said:

Anna: I guess just spending time with them, whether it's one on one or with a group of people.

Interviewer: Is it more formal? More relaxed?

Anna: Probably more relaxed. I'd say you're dating if it's more formal. To me there's like talking to and hanging out and then dating and then in a relationship.

Rae explained the differences between dating and hanging out this way,

I would say that if I were talking to a guy, we see each other at the same parties or maybe we go to parties together but have never really hung out by ourselves. I think if I said I were hanging out with a guy, it would mean that we had done something just the two of us.

Bob said that:

Hanging out is like a relaxed thing. Not like “let’s go on a formal date.” I guess it’s kind of an ambiguous type of phrase. It can fit in any type of situation.

In summary, the term hanging out is heavily context dependent. It can be used to describe spending time with friends or with potential romantic partners. In the romantic relationship context, hanging out can be used to describe a spending time together in a casual way or as a type of relationship that is more serious than talking to’ but is much less committed than dating.

Dating. According to the participants, dating can refer to a formal outing, which is planned and occurs in a public space. However, the students I spoke with did not report going on dates until after they had already become exclusive with their partners. For example, the following exchange occurred during an interview with Kate:

Interviewer: Do you go on official dates while you're talking to someone?

Kate: Not official dates. Maybe more casual, like go to lunch, go shopping downtown, or like watch a movie with friends, do things with friends, but not like a formal romantic dinner type thing. Not an, “I’ll pick you up at 8 and this is what we’re doing type thing.”

Interviewer: Ok, so when do those official romantic dates tend to happen?

Kate: Once you start dating.

Until they were officially dating, students reported that they would avoid asking others out on dates to avoid the awkwardness that was inherent to the date request scenario. Likely because of their aversion to using the term dating to describe spending time together pre-exclusivity (which was generally referred to as talking to or hanging out), dating was also used interchangeably with being in a long-term relationship; so two people were dating if they were exclusive. Todd explained, “Dating is when you’re in a long term relationship, I guess. Long term to college kids (laughter), but you’re in some sort of relationship that you nurture to make last.” Adam said that:

[When you are] dating someone I’d say there’s a sense of responsibility for both parties. So it’s more both parties put in an effort and there shouldn’t be any running around with other people.

When asked if dating relationships were monogamous, he replied, “Right. It’s an agreement, responsibility; it’s more of an emotional connection.” Participants were generally in agreement with Emma who said that, “dating would be like officially he asked you out, you’re exclusive.” While participants generally agreed that dating was synonymous with exclusivity, participants were aware that the term had changed in meaning over the past decade. When asked to define dating, Finn said:

Well, I feel like dating in the 90s, like when I watched *Friends* (the television show), I was a huge *Friends* fan, I remember that when they were dating someone it meant that they were like they were looking for relationships and going on dates. Now if someone is dating, they’re together with one person in a relationship, that’s just my opinion.

Students indicated that this flux in meaning led to misunderstanding with their parents when discussions about the romantic relationships occurred. Bella said:

I'd say, like my mom would say oh dating that just means oh going out on dates, and I know in traditional terms dating is not like official. But, dating to me means official, you are boyfriend girlfriend.

In sum, while dating can refer to the act of taking a person out on the town it was most commonly used to describe the state of being in an exclusive, monogamous, committed romantic relationship.

Hooking up. While dating is a term that has inter-generational differences in meaning, students in this study were clear in their own definitions. When two people were dating, it was indicated in students' talk that dating was a committed relationship. Hooking up, however, was more difficult for these students to define. One participant mentioned that "fuck buddies" was also an acceptable term to describe a purely sexual encounter while another mentioned that "smooshing" as acceptable alternative to hooking up. Because far fewer participants reported using these terms ($N = 4$), and their meanings were synonymous with hooking up, they were collapsed into the hooking up sub-theme. For these participants, hooking up was a term that varied widely and whose meaning was dependent upon the way in which their friends use it. However, all agreed that hooking up was sexual activity, of some kind, that occurred without the promise of commitment.

Some students, however, were exceptionally clear about the meaning of hookup, Jack said, "my definition of hookup is sex." Kate said, "It's [hooking up] a one-night thing. Definitely. It doesn't necessarily include sex, but it's definitely "Oh I just hooked up with that guy one time. I don't even know his name." Similarly, Kay was also resolute in her definition of hooking up. During the interview the following exchange occurred:

Kay: Definitely sex, and more of a one-time thing.

Interviewer: So no commitment?

Kay: No

The hallmark of a hookup relationship is a complete absence of commitment. However hooking up can also be used to describe a range of sexual behavior. Most of the respondents had the impression that ‘everyone else’ thinks that hooking up is sex, but that it can be just ‘making out’ (i.e., kissing and groping, but nothing under the clothes). One male participant, Jason described hooking up as any sexual activity that went past “second base” and did not occur within a committed relationship. The term second base stems from the baseball metaphor often employed by people attempting to describe how far they took their sexual encounters. According to Jason, getting past second base means engaging in sex acts that include touching the other’s genitals.

Another male participant, Kevin, said hooking up:

Could include anything from making out to sex in my book. Like if one of my buddies was like “Hey! What did you and that girl do last night?” if I just made out with her a little bit and just being a little touchy I would be like “We hooked up a little bit,” now if there was oral sex it would be like “Oh, we hooked up.” It is just a very broad term.

Susie was clear about the ambiguity that is attached to hooking up, she said:

Hooking up can mean different things to different people but like I see it as you meet in a place where there is probably alcohol and then you go spend the night together and probably like have sex or something and then that’s it like that’s probably a one-night kind of thing.

Finn echoed Kevin and Susie’s sentiments. He said:

If you hooked up with someone, you made out with someone, hand-job, blowjob what have you, um had sex. It is really all the above. Like anything beyond making out I would say that you hooked up.

However, Finn went on to say:

It's [hooking up] still used loosely. Hookup can mean a lot of things that's like the one thing when miscommunications happen. Like you'll get a text from a girl because you told your buddy that oh we hooked up, and then it got through the wire that they hooked up and then their friends will hear that they hooked up and then she'll be like "You're telling people we had sex" and I'll be like "No. We just made out at the bar. I'm telling my friend we hooked up." That happened to me.

Much like the situation Finn described, not all participants were as clear about the definition of hooking up. Karen thought the term often caused confusion and generally needed to be clarified, she said:

I know me and my friends don't really sleep around much so hooking up to us could be like making out then passing out. I feel like we have a much different view than some people because I've heard that some people, or talking to my friends from different schools I'll be like, "Yeah, we hooked up" and they'll be like, "You had sex with him? I can't believe that!" and I'll be like, "No! I didn't have sex with him!" So I think it's different for different people but me, I feel like hooking up is you go home with them. You could just make out or you could have sex with them.

While romantic relationships seem to progress from talking to, to hanging out (at least for some students), to dating, hooking up describes a separate set of sexual behaviors marked by a complete lack to ties to the other partner. In summary, hooking up is an ambiguous term that

refers to sexual activity ranging from kissing and groping to sexual intercourse that occurs without the expectation of commitment.

Patterns of PCT Use.

This section addresses the following research question:

RQ2: What patterns of PCT use are present in college students' romantic and/or sexual relationships across types of relational development?

According to these college students, sending text messages, making cell phone calls, and Facebooking (messaging, wall posting, and chatting) were all ways that they contacted their relational partners. Out of the 37 participants, only one did not currently have a Facebook page, primarily because he was tired of maintaining it and decided to take it down while he was on the job market. A small number ($N = 4$) of students also reported using email and instant messaging (IMing) in their relationships with current or previous partners. By far, however, the most commonly used communication technology reported during the interviews was texting. Paul enthusiastically argued that texting was the primary form of communication for his peers. He said:

I'd say texting is the biggest form or is the most important form of communication for people my age of starting any kind of romantic, romantically involved relationship, it is the biggest form of communication for college students. It is the most important, because it is so easy, you don't always have your computer, but you always have your phone and it is so easy to text, everyone is so good at it. My main point to leave on is texting is the biggest and most important part of our generation, kids my age; 18-22 or whatever and that is still going even more. Texting is the biggest and most important part of starting a relationship and it has been ever since college started for me at least and most of my

friends, it is not let's call up and go out on a date, let's text and meet up at night sometime.

Although not all interviewees were this clear about the importance and prevalence of text messaging on college campuses, it was implicit in their talk. As Paul mentions, college students are particularly fond of texting because of its affordances (e.g., mobility, low social cues). Students also indicated that different media were appropriate for different kinds of relationships. Emma distinguished between PCT use when hooking up versus dating, she said:

Serious dating I definitely associate with the phone calling. Texting to stay in contact like all day because you never want to NOT talk to them and then hooking up, texting I dunno. Sometimes people don't even text, they just hookup. But I guess it depends on the morals of both of them and how much they like each other if they want to text too.

Adam echoed Emma's assessment of PCT use in relationships. He said:

Hookups are more text [messaging] while the relationships are more calling because it's more personal. You could call a hookup person too, but it's just more convenient with the texting, And I know once someone's in a relationship, I have a bunch of friends who don't even use their Facebooks anymore because they're dating someone, they're always together, there's no point. They'll call or text, but they don't need to Facebook because they're right there [with each other].

Jason concurred with Emma and Adam. He said:

Jason: I feel like in the hooking up ones you're going to be texting a lot and you're going to be texting late and drunkenly, but in the relatively exclusive ones you're going to be calling the person more. I mean, you'll still be texting a fair amount, but you'll be picking up the phone a lot more. Because no one wants to be like, "Hey.

Come over. Let's hookup." [Interviewer: Why not?] Because it's awkward. Therein lies the awkwardness. Right there.

Beyond differences in dating and hooking up, students also discussed the ways in which media use changed as relationships developed, for example Kay explained:

Well, I think it depends on the relationship, just depending on how often both of you do it, but early in the relationship I think texting happens more often just because I think it's a easier communication and it's less awkward and more direct. So earlier in the relationship I think that texting happens more.

When asked about how she contacted a person she was talking to, Susie said:

Text messaging would be used a lot, but not to the point where you're texting them in the middle of the day and saying, "Oh my gosh, guess what just happened to me!" More like, "Hey, what are you doing tonight?" I think there's not very much to text about when you're in that stage of your relationship. You have to spend actual time with that person to really figure out if you really want to commit to them in any sort of way. Facebooking and phone calling isn't really necessary except for let's hang out here, let's go to this party. I think in that stage of the relationship, to figure out anything further you have to actually be with.

As mentioned by Susie, while students indicated that there were definite expectations for PCT use within relationship types, it was also the interaction between the communication medium and communication purpose that helped determine the acceptability of their PCT choice. While this analysis provides insight into the patterns of PCT use across relational microtypes, the survey described and analyzed in chapter four will examine these patterns in more detail.

Reasons for PCT Use

This section addresses the following research question:

RQ3: What reasons do students give for using different PCTs in their romantic/sexual relationships?

Analysis of the interviews revealed that participants were talking about their reasons for PCT use on two separate levels: (1) the communicative acts in which they were engaged and (2) the underlying motives guiding media choice, which are informed by relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999), facework (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Goffman, 1967; Kunkel et al., 2000), and media affordances (Baym, 2010; Hutchby, 2001a, 2001b). The first theme, communicative acts, addresses the reasons participants gave for contacting their partners in different relational microtypes. This theme encompasses five communicative activities: micro-coordination, arranging plans, flirting, having a long conversation and just chatting (for summary, see Appendix F).

Communicative acts. Analysis of the patterns of PCT use in a college student population demonstrated the importance of understanding participants' reasons for contacting their relational partners. The most common reasons given by students for contacting the romantic/sexual partners were: to micro-coordinate, to arrange plans, to just chat, to flirt, and to have a long conversation.

Micro-coordination. Micro-coordination (Ling, 2004; Ling & Yttri, 2002) refers to the ability to adjust plans on the fly. The ability for mobile technologies to enable this type of spontaneous social organizing was instrumental when deciding if someone could call a person s/he was talking to. For example, when asked about the kinds of things he thought was appropriate to call about when in a talking to relationship, Ron said "umm...when you go to pick

them up. Like “I’m at your door! That’s it.” Emma was in-line with Ron’s thinking, “Umm...we text to set plans and then call him when I show up. Like “I’m here!” For these participants, microcoordination legitimized the need to make a phone call.

Arranging Plans. Short phone calls were also deemed acceptable for arranging casual plans. Rae explained when calls are acceptable:

Like a quick phone call in the afternoon saying, “Hey, I’m going to a show tonight. I wanted to see if you wanted to go with me.” I mean, that would be awesome. I’d love it if guys would do that, but if they call you to chitchat or something, which is never going to happen, but I’d be like, “Did you need something?” If it’s not just a brief phone call, it’s going to be a text.

One student, Finn, reported using Facebook as a way to jump-start a relationship with a person he had already met with face-to-face. He used wall posts to subtly flirt and then after building up a rapport, he would text to arrange a meeting. Finn explained:

Finn: I Facebooked her, wrote on her wall like, yeah, (laughter) “How are you doing, you know did you have a good time at the party?”

Interviewer: Did she write back?

Finn: Yeah she wrote back, and then it trades back and forth a few times, inside jokes or something, and then, you know, you’ll just obviously get to the [in person] bar hookup. You try to bring her home if you really like her, that’s the icebreaker, then you could like start talking to them when you’re sober. I guess that’s really, college students drinking and relationships have come like hand-in-hand. Like if you want to hookup with someone you both have to be drunk at a bar with your friends to get it going, no one, it’s not, chivalry is so dead. You do not knock on the door and be like, “Hey, mister! I’d like

to take your daughter out for a date I'll have her back by nine.” It's like alcohol because social anxieties I feel like just kill people. So that drives them to the alcohol, and then it's just easier to get your feelings out, make the move.

However, when asked if he arranged the bar meet up on thru any of the Facebook channels, he said:

That usually comes with a text, once you get past Facebook you're not going to call her that next day to like hey lets hang out, I'm calling you. You want to be more sly about it, slower, so you shoot like a text, like, “What are you up to tonight? Wanna meet me at [the Bar] or do you want to meet me at the [Other Bar] or [a Third Bar].”

While students would use Facebook occasionally to talk with current or potential romantic partners, they were more likely to report arranging plans through texting or short phone calls.

Just Chat. While within dating relationships, communication without a specific purpose, or to ‘just chat’ with the other was acceptable, in the early stages of a romantic relationship (e.g., talking to and hanging out) it was unacceptable to contact the other without a specific purpose.

When asked about how he would go about contacting a person he met and found attractive, Zeke said:

I would probably find something to go do and call them and say, “Hey! You wanna go do this with me?” I wouldn't just call to say, “Hey let's talk on the phone!” I would ask them to go do something. But if I was texting then it might be something small like maybe if it was like their birthday or a holiday or any little reason you could find to text for. If they have a Facebook and you see their status update you might text like, “Oh, hey, I like your new hair!” or something like that.

Finn was also positive that people should not call without a reason in the early stages of courtship. He said:

You have to have a reason [to call], unless you're like dating or you're together you're not going to call them and talk just to talk. You could call them and say like, "Yo! I'm on my way to [bar] meet me there, but that's it."

Here, Finn indicates that while a brief call to coordinate evening plans en-route would be acceptable, a call without a clear reason would be, as many students put it, "creepy." Karen was torn about phone calls when she was still in the talking to stage. She said:

I would like a phone call, but if I got a phone call I'd probably be creeped out. One of my friends would be like, "Why is he calling you? Have you like talked to him a lot?" There's a general belief that that's weird, but I think that's just because everybody's relied on texting and everybody, or at least my friends and I, just assume that guys prefer texting so it's like, "Why is he calling?"

Bob helps shed light on why Karen might be feeling conflicted. When asks about how he "got together" with his current girlfriend, he suggests is because of social norms that more people do not call. During this conversation the following exchange occurred:

Interviewer: So how did you go about asking her out?

Bob: She had been wanting to hang out with me so I just invited her to parties.

Interviewer: Did you call or text?

Bob: Text.

Interviewer: Why text?

Bob: Because no one calls.

Interviewer: Why does no one call?

Bob: I mean if you're like dating, or I only call people when I'm extremely close to, like friends or like, I would never call someone I have not talked to on the phone before.

Does that make sense? Especially if it's a girl. You don't really just call them up. That's kind of creepy, I guess nowadays. I don't know why it is, I mean, I like talking on the phone. I think it's a lot more personal and texting is like so, but nobody calls anymore and it kind of sucks.

Beyond calling when in a committed relationship, the suggestion that students might call someone they had hooked up with to 'just chat' was met by nearly universal laughter (at me) followed by quick clarification. For example, Anna said

Definitely texting would be the way to approach that [hooking up] like something like "hookup tonight?" or maybe you have just like a movie, obviously watching a movie is never just watching a movie so maybe just like "watch a movie tonight?" but definitely text no calling.

Flirting. Similarly, when asked if he thought there were differences in how people use communication technologies in different kinds of relationships, Zack indicated that for hooking up messages need to be goal directed, based around arranging the next hookup, but for people one was more seriously interested in, he argued that being more off-topic or flirty is fine. Zack said:

Whenever you're hooking up the texts will be more direct, like whenever you want to hang out/hookup again. When you want more of a relationship or date in the future it would be more of a nice thing just a little more love displayed to them here and there. Like hope you have a good day or good morning sunshine.

Other participants also mentioned that flirting was an activity they engaged in via multiple communication media. When asked about what kinds of things she generally texts to a person she is talking to Becca, said:

Just like, “Hey what are you doing? How was work?” Just typical things you would say in a normal conversation just at a slower pace. Some flirting. I don’t know usually you run out of things to talk about kind of quickly over text until you know them better.

Jason was particularly clear about preferring to flirt via communication technologies with reduced social cues, especially in newly forming relationships. He explained:

Jason: Like flirting over Facebook chat or like at night. You can flirt with them over Facebook or instant messaging. Not so much email. You need to synchronize mediums for more flirting. But texting is probably the biggest one.

Interviewer: Would you flirt on the phone?

Jason: For long-term, yes. For short term, I don’t know. That’s kind of awkward.

Interviewer: Why do you think so?

Jason: Because you both know that you are thinking the same thing but you don’t want to say it unless you are really outgoing and expressive. But a lot more guys are kind of shy and reserved. So texting is easier to say things whenever you are texting or whenever you don’t have to be face-to-face or actually hear their voice.

While students generally reported using Facebook across types of relationships, Rae argued that as relationships become closer Facebook use declines. She said:

Facebook-wise, I feel like you’re not going to use it as much, because why would you be using Facebook if you can just go hang out with them or call them on the phone? I think Facebook would probably be good for long distance relationships. That’s helpful

and of course every girl's going to Facebook stalk her boyfriend to see who's writing on his wall and who's posting pictures and all that kind of thing.

Long conversation. Only one participant, Emma, reported using Facebook messaging as a way to have long, often serious, conversations. She and her partner would often spend hours composing and sending messages to each other through Facebook. This was especially important to her when she had an issue with the relationship that she did not feel she could adequately address in person because she might become flustered during a face-to-face conversation. She said:

Well, (...) it depends on the content I would say. If it was something about contacting to meet up with him, I might just call him real quick. Sometimes if it's something really serious or I have a lot I want to get out I will Facebook message him because we do really well emailing back and forth. And I guess it just depends.

When asked if she thought her relationship trajectory, which began in person, migrated to Facebook chat and then to long Facebook messages was typical of college student courtship, she said, "I (...) yes and no. Not to the extent that we did. Like I have never heard of...like my friends would look over and see our messages and be like 'ohh my gosh!'" While Emma's experience might not be common, her use of Facebook messaging is an interesting use of new communication technologies to navigate serious relational discussion within a dating relationship.

Underlying motives for PCT use. In addition to the communicative activities, present in participants' talk were the motivations that drove their PCT use. During the analysis of the interviews, it became clear that students were relying on implicit logics to guide their PCT use, logics which changed depending upon relational microtype. These logics or motivations

represent the second theme that addresses RQ3. This theme (underlying motivations) encompasses three subthemes: relational uncertainty, face, and media affordances. This section explains the ways in which these three separate theoretical constructs help to explain participants' PCT use (for summary, see Appendix F). However, while these reasons represent three distinct subthemes, they are also completely enmeshed in the students talk about PCT use in romantic/sexual relationships.

When participants were high in relational uncertainty, which was especially common in their talk about talking to and hooking up relationships, they were also more likely to report being very aware of potential face threats and strategically using the affordances of different technologies to mitigate those threats. When participants talked about dating relationships, which for them means committed and monogamous, they were less concerned about face threats and the strategic use of PCTs. Finally, students most often spoke of how they used texting and phoning as ways to navigate the early stages of romantic relationships.

Relational uncertainty. As discussed in the first chapter, relationship theorists have long held that different relationship stages entail differing amounts of relational uncertainty. The interviews in this study strongly suggest that this is a factor as students decide which medium to use in each of the four microtypes identified in this work (hanging out, talking to, dating and hooking up). Students most often spoke of partner and relationship sources of relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999).

Because they were uncertain of how their object of affection felt about them, students in this sample reported trepidation when contacting the people they were 'talking to.' Students often spoke about the difficulties they had deciding when to text and when to phone during the early part of a relationship. This trepidation stems from the students' uncertainty about the

feelings of the other towards themselves and about the relationship. When students were interested in forming a relationship with an attractive other, and were uncertain about how their potential partner felt about them, which was a common theme in their talk about talking to and hooking up, they were more likely to employ a lean medium, generally texting, to contact that partner. Jane gives insight into the reason people might be less likely to call when talking to someone. She said:

To have someone call you is just like, I don't know, it might be a little awkward to talk to them. Maybe more uncomfortable than a text because you can't think what you're going to say. You would rather avoid phone call [early on in the relationship].

Anna talked about her feelings of nervousness on the first occasion she had to call the person who she, at the time this interview was conducted, was dating, and how those feelings have changed as the relationship developed. She explained:

I remember the first time I went over to [boyfriend's name] my boyfriend's house I was like "Ohmygod! Should I call? Should I say I'm almost here?" like "Should I tell him to come out so I know which apartment it is?" I was kind of panicking and trying to figure out when exactly to call and now it's just like, "Hey I'm almost to your house." I mean it's no big deal at all.

While Anna reports being very unsure of what would appropriate phone use early on in the relationship, she was comfortable calling her partner once they were in an established relationship. As the relationship developed, and her relational uncertainty decreased, it seems so did her anxiety about phoning her boyfriend. When participants were more certain about the status of their relationship, for example if they had mutually decided to be exclusive,

participants, like Anna, worried less about the appropriateness of contacting their partners via the telephone. For example, Mark said:

Mark: But after you've been on a couple dates, and you know that it's leading up to exclusive or it's already exclusive and you know she's not seeing or talking to anyone else, it's okay to call. And I can talk to you or you can talk to me and call me for like 45 minutes, and it's not creepy that I'm calling her or like too pushy I'm calling her.

Interviewer: You're not going to see her number and be like, "Why are you calling me?"

Mark: Exactly.

Interviewer: You'll see her number and be like, "Girlfriend."

Mark: Exactly. And it's weird how words mean so much, but it does. It's like, "Okay, you're my girlfriend now, so great." I know you're not talking to anyone else and I'm not talking to anyone else. We're both okay. I feel comfortable calling you and talking to you, not just asking questions, more like, "Tell me about your day." Stuff like that.

Zeke also believed that phoning is connected to relationship development and decrease relational uncertainty. He said:

I don't think people would really call and talk until you really know you have that connection, and that you can really open up to them, that you know a lot about each other and you can trust telling them things that you don't want them telling a bunch of other people.

Zeke points out that as relationships develop and partners grow closer, trust also increases. He connects phoning to an established relationship, one in which individuals feel comfortable disclosing important pieces of information about themselves to the other. Becca echoed Zeke's

point. She said, “I definitely think you are more comfortable with the person if you talk on the phone with them rather than text.” Rae clearly explained how media use related to relationship development in a way that nicely summarized participant responses. She said:

I feel like if you’ve made the commitment, you’re boyfriend and girlfriend, you’re Facebook official, you’re actually going to talk on the phone more because that makes it okay to talk on the phone. It doesn’t make it awkward to talk on the phone anymore, and that’s the point where maybe you can text them in the middle of day and say, “Guess what happened to me today?”

As pointed out by Mark, Zeke, Becca, and Rae, once their relationships were more developed, which for the majority of them meant they were exclusive, these participants felt free to phone call as they saw fit. It seems to be only in relationships characterized by high relational uncertainty that these young adults felt they needed to think strategically about phoning. This is partly because of the symbolic meaning these students were attaching to telephone use, a finding that will be fleshed out in an upcoming section.

While phoning without purpose was taboo when participants reflected on talking to and was seen as more acceptable in dating relationships, there were also changes in the way they described texting their partners. Students often talked about the amount of time and effort they dedicated to composing texts. Early on in relationships, students put a significant amount of thought into crafting the ideal text. Jane had this to say about texting early on in a relationship:

I’m always like oh what should I say I want to sound interested, but not like, “Oh yeah let’s go hang out lets meet up,” so detached a little bit, but it comes to a point like after two weeks I want to say where it really doesn’t matter what you say if you have been texting a lot then it really doesn’t matter.

Similarly, when asked about how much effort she puts into composing text messages to her current boyfriend, Becca said:

I spend way less time now than I used to, because I wouldn't be worried as much about sounding too "Hey! I want a relationship!" or too "Hey! I want to be just friends."

Because you worry [early on in a relationship] about that like oh maybe I should change this word I don't want to sound freaky, so you don't have to worry as much or as often it's just easier to do. The pressure's off, you're already in, you're good.

This concern was particularly heightened for these students if they cared about the other's impression of them. Becca went on to explain that she became more concerned with carefully crafting her text messages when she realized she was starting to like the man who was courting her. She said:

[At first] I was kind of skeptical because I thought he was kind of talking to my friend and I wasn't that interested...well, I was, but I just didn't care as much as if I really like a guy to begin with. But I could tell he was really interested so, he was more interested than I was so I wasn't really caring how I sounded when I was texting him, but after hanging out awhile I started being cautious what I was saying and I wanted him to keep liking me and now I actually care [about my messages] [laughs]. At the beginning though I didn't really care as much.

As her interest in establishing a relationship with the man who was courting her increased, so did the amount of effort she reported dedicating to crafting texts. When asked why people text when talking to, Jarrod said:

It's way easier. You're not putting yourself out there nearly as much, I don't know why that is. Hearing the other person's voice on the other line that's a little bit scary. I just

feel like if a girl gives you her number, like in the movies the guy calls her 2 days after, like the 2-day rule or whatever, but it's more like you just send her a text. And you don't have to have that awkward interaction. It's [texting] easier and less awkward.

Students were, across the board, wary of using the phone in the beginning stages of a potential romantic/hookup relationship. Phone calls seemed to symbolize relational intimacy or seriousness that they felt uncomfortable performing early on in romantic relationships or in hookups, a finding that will be discussed in more detail in an upcoming section. In order to save face, participants often employed lean media when contacting the person they were 'talking to.'

Facework. As discussed in chapter one, face concerns seem heightened in the early stages of romantic relationships; students talked more about face threats in regards to beginning new relationships rather than maintaining dating relationships. Students were primarily concerned with their own positive face (Brown & Levinson, 1987), particularly with not wanting to appear *desperate* [or "needy" in Kunkel et al.'s (2003) terms] both to the object of their affection and, perhaps more interestingly, to their friends. They also expressed concern for protecting their potential partner's negative face by not putting them in a position where they would feel *pressured to comply* (Kunkel et al. 2003). These interviews also suggest that students were protecting their positive face by avoiding the awkward, disjointed conversations that often occur in the early stages of romantic relationships.

Participants in this study were engaging in different media practices in order to avoid being embarrassed or embarrassing others. These practices range from communicating via lean media, e.g., texting instead of phoning as suggested in the previous section, under conditions of high relational uncertainty within developing relationships to spending time carefully crafting text messages to avoid looking 'desperate.' As some of the examples the previous section

pointed out, students reported that texting created a sort of buffer that allowed them to save face. Although one student mentioned face saving as an important goal in PCT choice, most were not explicitly aware of this motivation. Rae, when asked why she thought college students were setting up opportunities to spend time with people they were talking to, said:

It's [texting] not as personal and you're not as susceptible to making an idiot of yourself. And if you get turned down then you don't have to be like, "Okay, well then I'll talk to you later. Have a good night." Relationships are so awkward and they're going to be awkward. Everything about boy-meets-girl is awkward and text messaging reduces the awkwardness so people use it to their advantage and I don't blame anyone for wanting to use text messaging. I mean, there are some things it's not appropriate for, but I feel like it reduces the awkwardness and it makes the girl and the guy feel more comfortable.

Jason agreed with Rae. When asked how he would contact a girl he was interested in dating after meeting her in person and getting her number, Jason said:

I would text to avoid any awkwardness. Because I hate awkwardness and I know a lot of people hate awkwardness because it's awkward. Yeah. I would text. And then I would text like, "Are you going out? What are you doing beforehand? Do you maybe want to go get dinner?" Or something like that.

When asked why he would not call, he replied:

Because it's a lot easier to text and it's a lot easier to avoid rejection...and people don't want to threaten their face. So it's a lot easier to save face and maintain the face via text messaging.

Emma who was in a serious romantic relationship, argued that texting was ‘easier’ than making phone calls earlier on in relationship. When asked if she thought there was a difference between PCT use when talking to versus dating someone, Emma said:

Oooh, definitely. I would be waaaay nervous to call him in the beginning. You just don’t want those awkward silences, you don’t want to have to deal with them, texting is easier.

Jim argued that texting gives people more control over their messages than phoning does. When asked about whether he spends time thinking of the perfect way to compose a text message, Jim said, “Absolutely! Especially when you're trying to feel who someone is and you don’t want to give the wrong impression.” When asked about what he was trying to avoid sounding like, Jim said, “Probably desperate. You don’t want to sound over-anxious, and you don’t want to show that because its that whole hard to get thing, you got to play a little hard to get.”

Chelsea, when asked if she ever spends time composing text messages, said, “Absolutely, I do read it a couple of times to make sure it sounds right.” When asked what she meant by “sounds right” the following exchange occurred:

Chelsea: Just like does this sound too desperate? Or am I pushing this too hard? Does this sound ok? You know try to not make them feel awkward.

Interviewer: Got it. So, and please tell me if this is wrong, it sounds as if you are trying to be sort of ambiguous in case he is not into you so you can be like, ‘No. Dude, I totally meant as friends.’

Chelsea: Exactly. That happens a lot too because you never know until they're like, ‘Oh. I'm not that interested.’ and you can just be like, “Oh, yeah, of course. That’s what I was talking about [being friends].”

Jim and Chelsea described a message construction process that is strategically ambiguous (Eisenberg, 1984); in which people expend effort to craft a message that can be read as friendly or as flirtatious given the interest level of the person they are contacting.

Kay explained why this ambiguity was so important to face saving, especially under conditions of high relational uncertainty. She said, “It’s because you don’t want to be more into it than the other person is because then you look stupid.” Rob concurred with Kay. When asked why he would not text a girl more than once without a response, he explains, “Because I don’t want to sound desperate. And this maybe very James Dean-ish, but I want to seem like I care, but I don’t care.” Texting allows Rob to maintain a cool exterior, even if he felt less than “James Dean-ish.” The increased control over messages that texting affords enables college students to cultivate the impression that they care, but not too much, in the mind of their object of affection.

These young adults carefully construct messages that are both casual and ambiguous, meaning they could be read as either an indication of friendship or romantic interest given the disposition of the reader. Should one of the parties not be interested in pursuing a romantic and/or sexual relationship with the other, this control protects the face of both participants. Rather than having to call a girl or ask her out in person and risk stumbling over words or saying something embarrassing, being able to carefully craft a text message helps reduce the face threat that is inherent to relationship initiation.

In addition to carefully crafting messages to avoid sound desperate, participants also reported taking advantage of a medium’s digital affordances in order to save face. As texting transmits fewer cues than phone calling, it also gives the initiator a way out of an initiation attempt gone bad. These media affordances will be explored in the next section.

Media affordances. As detailed in chapter one, media affordances stem from the

technology's design. Encompassed within this subtheme are four types of affordances: a medium's ability to transmit social cues, perceived privacy, temporal structure, and mobility. Students often exploited these affordances in order to save face, especially in relationships characterized by high relational uncertainty. The affordance of reduced social cues was closely tied to face saving and will be addressed first.

Reduced social cues. Because of the reduced number of social cues transmitted by texting, students were more easily able to lie in order to save face. Instead of having to tell their partner that they spent a half hour planning and writing the perfect message, they can claim to have been otherwise engaged, perhaps talking with a friend or their parents. Others claimed that a friend had stolen their phone in order to save face. Mark said this in regards to setting up a get together with a girl he was talking to:

If I've had a couple drinks and now I don't really care if she says no. I can say like, "I don't remember doing that!" or "My friends stole my phone." Being rejected is embarrassing. With texting you have a cover up.

Engaging in this kind of controlled casualness (Sims, 2007), via texting affordances, helps the initiator avoid public embarrassment. Regardless of the other's reply (although clearly acceptance is better and less face-threatening than rejection), participants so disliked the feeling of potential embarrassment and the awkward pauses a direct request in person or over the phone was likely to prompt, they did their best to avoid such an occurrence. Bob said that texting was preferable because:

You don't have to hear her voice. You can think. You're not on the spot. Like if you said something stupid, you can't take it back, but if type it out then read it you can delete it before you send it.

Here Bob references the benefits of employing a medium that transmits fewer social cues and allows for asynchronicity. Mary agreed, that because of the reduced social cues via text, it was easier to arrange casual meet ups that might be dates, but could also be construed as friendly get-togethers via text. She said, “Because you’re not speaking to them so they can’t hear the tone of your voice and the see you, easy to disguise emotions.”

Privacy. In addition to allowing users to filter out unwanted emotional content, because texting does not require oral communication, it can be done with relative *privacy*. Students were also concerned with how their friends would perceive their relational communication. Their concern was that their peers would think they were overly needy, or, as Finn charmingly put it, “pussy whipped.” Jason explained it this way:

If it’s guy time, you get shit for talking to your girl during guy time. I mean, it just looks bad. But no one has to know you’re texting and they can’t hear what you’re saying.

Thus, students also considered privacy one of the affordances that texting allows. Texting enables students to have on-going conversations that people in their same physical location, whether that was a bar or in class, are not privy to. When asked about texting in early stage of relationship development, Todd said:

Oh yeah, I see that all the time with my friends actually. They text quite often to a person they are trying to develop a relationship with because: (1) You can be hanging out with a group of friends texting, but if you’re on the phone, anyone in the group shuts down to listen to your conversation, and (2) You have an obligation to come with a come back right away. It’s awkward especially if you’re in a group. If you’re by yourself it’s easier to talk on the phone than in a group situation.

Because it is more private than calling, students also reported engaging in text messaging during class, as a way to maintain, especially in dating relationships, a constant connection with their partner. For example, Anna said:

Anna: Texting lets me keep constant communication throughout the day because you can wait an hour and still text them back and - I don't know - I think phone calls would be kind of difficult to keep a conversation going.

Interviewer: So seems like you might also have more time to text?

Anna: Yeah. Like if you're sitting in class you can text someone, but you can't really talk on the phone.

Like phone calling, the public nature of Facebook wall posts (FbWPs) were also problematic for some respondents. When asked about his use of wall posts in a previous relationship, Ron said:

Ohh she loved that! I hated it. I enjoyed receiving wall posts that were like, 'I love you! Have a great day!' but I don't post on walls much unless it is very relevant or funny that everyone will get.[...] I prefer [Facebook] messages so I could say more in it without worrying about if one of my professors or one of my parents are reading it. I am more conscious of privacy than she was.

Like Ron, Bella was aware of, and concerned about, the public nature of the messages sent via FbWPs. She said:

Like I use Facebook just to write on people's walls, but now I don't believe in disclosing personal stuff about the relationship [via FbWPs] unless we were to break up. Of course we'd have to become non official, which would be sad but I wouldn't say, "Oh I'm mad at [boyfriend] because he did this."

When asked why she would not want to do use FbWPs to disclose relational information, Bella said:

Because I think it's just private and it's embarrassing to him and it's not fair to him, you know. Plus I have like, tons of friends I don't really talk to on Facebook and they're getting that information and that's just too much information, you know.

Similarly, Ben argued that it was inappropriate to ask a girl out via a FbWPs because it too public and threatened the face of both parties. He said:

I'd say the "Hey, let's go to dinner." type thing because maybe they're not interested in you the same way you're interested in them, and you're sort of putting that out there and might make them uncomfortable. So they might just cut the interest off. They might just not talk to you so much anymore. So it's mostly like you want to stay comfortable, and if it becomes uncomfortable then that's just never good.

Ben felt that asking a woman out so publicly could have face-threatening consequences for them both. Her negative face is threatened because she might feel pressured to give an affirmative answer even if she did not want to go. His positive face is threatened because if she said 'No.' on her wall, all of her Facebook friends will know that he has been turned down. Because of the relatively public nature of Facebook wall posts, these students were hesitant about using this particular medium as a way to contact those they were 'talking to.'

Temporal Structure. Students also reported taking advantage of the temporal structure of different PCTs. When asked about why she avoided phoning in the early stages of romantic relationships (e.g. talking to), Anna said:

Because you have more time to think about what you're going to say. I think less awkward. Because, I don't know, there's less of a chance of rejection kind of. But

mostly just less awkward because it's kind of awkward if you miss a phone call and then have to call them back. I think if you don't know them well, but if you get a text and say, "Sorry, I was doing this."

Zack was in agreement with Anna. When asked the same question, he said, "To avoid the awkwardness that the telephone could bring, also to give the person time to reply and to be able to choose your words and to reread it." Both Anna and Zack reference the asynchronicity that texting allows for as a benefit. The ability not to respond in real-time means that people have an enhanced ability to carefully craft messages. Becca agreed. She argued that with texting, "You don't have to be nervous you have time to think about your responses, they can't see if you're blushing. I have spent like ten minutes writing a text before." Finn further explained:

Well if you're put on the spot [either in person or over the phone], I mean I'm all right on the spot, but I have a lot of friends that just can't be put on the spot with a girl it's just too much pressure. Texts you can think about it for a second, you can think about what you want to say, think about how they're going to perceive it; you can be more methodical and planned out.

Although Finn reports being comfortable riffing off the cuff, he suggests that his friends prefer to have the temporal buffer that a medium that allows for asynchronous interaction affords. Over the phone a delay in response quickly becomes awkward and perhaps problematic. During a text message conversation, a delay in response is perfectly acceptable and can easily be explained. In this way, texting gives both parties more freedom in replying. Mark said:

And if you see things not going the way you want them going [via text], you just don't respond, but with the phone it's real time...it's just like you're screwed.

Not only did the sender of the text message have more time and freedom in responding, thus posing less of a threat to face, it also shows consideration for the other's time by allowing them to respond at a moment that is best for them. Roger highlights the tension between calling and texting, but ultimately decides that texting provides more advantages,

Just in case she is busy or doing something. I mean phone calls are probably better, but they're just awkward. It's more convenient to text. Say it's the Sunday the next day and she is at church. You don't want to call her while she is at church. How awkward is that?! With texts they can respond whenever. If they take all day to respond they can be like "Oh sorry I was swimming all day!" and you can presume they are telling the truth.

Like Roger, most participants told me that they thought that phone calling would be better or more personal or more intimate, but they all generally still preferred texting.

Mobility. Students were not as likely to contact their romantic/sexual partner through Facebook as they were to contact him/her via texting or phoning. Although many mobile devices allow for internet access, there were still extra steps to accessing Facebook that made that platform less desirable for quick or off-the-cuff communication than more easily accessed text or phone call. When asked if he would prefer to contact a woman he had interest in via Facebook, Jim, who had recently deleted his Facebook account, said:

Texting to me just seems so much quicker. Like Facebook you got to log in, find her, then send the message, hit send and then wait for the reply for her to log in and like I mean the response is, like it will show up because it will show up on our phone and you can respond, but I just prefer text message on a phone. It's easier. It kind of goes back to my whole "why I don't have Facebook any more" thing, I guess.

Even when students acknowledged that Facebook was just as easily accessible on their mobile devices as texting, they still preferred texting, likely because of the reasons Jim outlined above. For example, Jack when asked about how he would go about contacting a girl he had just met, said:

It's mainly [through] text because it's a lot quicker for me. Well, I guess it could be Facebook, because I had Facebook on my phone and she had Facebook on her phone [a specific woman he had been talking to], so Facebook or text would have been the same response time, but I would prefer to text or talk if we had to.

As quoted earlier, Paul argued that texting was the “most important form of communication” for college students. He said:

I'd say texting is the biggest form or is the most important form of communication for people my age of starting any kind of romantic, romantically involved relationship. It is the biggest form of communication is most important, because it is *so easy*. You don't always have your computer, but *you always have your phone* and it is so easy to text, everyone is so good at it.

Here, Paul makes an explicit connection between ease of use and likelihood of use. Because cell phones are highly mobile, it makes them an especially attractive, and easy, form of communication. Texting is likely the most commonly used PCT for college students precisely because of its digital affordances.

Problematizing lean media. While only one participant reported preferring to hash out serious issues with her boyfriend via reduced cue, asynchronous media, others did acknowledge that they saw benefits to doing so. When asked why she preferred to use Facebook messaging (FbM) to hash out relationship issues, Emma said:

My thoughts get all jumbled and I need to think them through so it's a lot easier to do than looking him in the face and doing it. Being able to lay in bed at night and be like "ok, this is how I feel" and just start typing. That works out for me.

Roger did not like discussing relational issues via mediated channel, but he acknowledged that the reduced social cues and asynchronous structure could be beneficial for some:

Roger: We were watching the Godfather and she texted me and asked "What are we?" and I was like really??

Interviewer: Why do you think she did that?

Roger: She doesn't want to say something the wrong way. It's easier to be thought out. I mean it makes sense, but it's just frustrating. I feel like I'm pretty good responding verbally as opposed to a text message. Because you can make facial expressions and use your nonverbals. You can't really do that through texting. I don't think texting is as meaningful as conversation.

Like Roger, while most participants wanted to avoid potentially face-threatening situation by texting, some participants acknowledged there were circumstances in initiating or escalating a relationship where using a richer medium had its advantages. When initiating a romantic relationship with a platonic friend with whom he shared a class, Mark thought it was preferable to broach the topic of spending time together through face-to-face communication. He argued that the increased social cues enhanced his the ability to gauge reactions and to adjust appropriately in ways that just were not possible via text or Facebook message. When talking about his current girlfriend, whom he met while taking a class, Mark said:

If I texted her and she never responded – because sometimes I don't respond to texts and it's not on purpose – if she didn't respond to it, I didn't want to take it as like, "Oh, she's

not interested” or the next day when I saw her in class it’d be kind of awkward, you like, if she never said anything. So then you would wonder, “Do I say anything now that we’re in class or is it just like it-never-happened?” If I do it face-to-face then it’d just be right there, see her face, see how she says it, mannerisms, that type of stuff.

This suggests that while most students prefer texting to negotiate their relationships, under the right circumstances having access to more social cues might help the initiator to better read and control the situation. This seems to be especially true if the pair is involved in an involuntary relationship because they are taking the same college courses or are co-workers.

Similarly, Rae argued that big relationship decisions needed to be made in person, precisely because she had more contextual information. She felt this way because the affordances of texting that allow for face-saving in some circumstances can also lead to embarrassment. When asked how she would respond to a “let’s be exclusive” text, she said:

I’d probably respond to that one better than I would to a breakup text, but I’d be like, ‘Um, did you want to meet for coffee and talk about this?’ I would try to initiate something face-to-face just because I’m not comfortable over text message, I mean, they could be sitting in a dorm room with their buddies and setting me up to look like a fool, I mean, boys are immature. They do that kind of stuff. So I feel like I would be like, ‘Would you want to meet for coffee and talk about this?’ and if they were like, ‘No, just answer me,’ then I’d just be like, ‘Don’t talk to me. Get away from me.’

When Rae was asked if the face-to-face meeting would be a test to determine if the other was genuinely interested, she said:

If a guy’s going to ask you out, want to be exclusive over a text, I feel like he has an issue with being serious. It’s the first thing I think, so I’d want to make sure that this

is legitimate, especially if I really like the guy. I wouldn't want to be like, "Oh my gosh yes I'll be your girlfriend!" and then the next day see him in class, and he totally ignores you and is like kissing some other girl. I don't want to set myself up with someone like that, so I would try to set up something face-to-face where we could legitimize it.

Other women were also skeptical of the intent behind text messages, primarily because of their ability to be sent to multiple girls at once. For example:

Tanya: For guys I'd say if they're interested it's a really good thing to call because it lets a girl know that they're interested rather than just texting.

Interviewer: Because texting is more informal and requires less effort?

Tanya: Yeah, and he could be texting 10 other girls, too.

Phone calls, women were quick to point out, could only be made to one person at a time, which meant the call carried more relational weight than texts, especially in talking to relationships. The symbolic meaning participants attached to media use will be further explored in the next section.

Symbolic Meaning of PCT Use

This section addresses the following research question:

RQ4: What meanings do college students attach to PCT use in romantic and/or sexual relationships?

The interview data offered insight into the ways in which college students are negotiating and attaching meaning to PCT use in their romantic and/or sexual relationships. The analysis indicated two subthemes: (1) the symbolic meaning of media choice and (2) the symbolic meaning of the nonverbal characteristics of messages. This section will first address the first theme, symbolic meaning attached to PCT use (for summary, see Appendix G). Because

students spoke about and reported using texting and phone most often, this section primarily focuses on the meanings they attached to those technologies.

Symbolic meaning of media choice. Students were clear about the meanings attached to texting, phoning and Facebook wall posts, but were less certain about what meanings different kinds of PCTs had in romantic/sexual relationships. While students discussed using email, instant message, Facebook chat, Facebook message, Facebook wall posts, text messages, and phone calls during the interviews, they articulated the symbolic meaning of phone use with exceptional clarity. The meaning attached to phone use was often contrasted with the symbolic meaning of texting. This is likely because participants talked about texting their partners when talking to, hanging out, and hooking up more than they discussed contacting them using any other medium.

PCT use was especially scrutinized for relational meaning when participants were high in relational uncertainty. Once students were in dating relationships, students felt that medium use carried less meaning about how their partner felt about them. Once comfortable within their relationship, participants typically no longer agonized over media choice; in dating relationships students' media repertoires opened up.

Likely because students perceived phone calls as face-threatening in talking to/hooking up relationships, they took on additional symbolic meaning. For example, Rae said:

I think a phone call definitely means more than a text message. It's obviously more personal and more awkward so it shows he cares if he's willing to put up with how awkward it is because guys avoid awkward situations.

Phone use, "means more" because it is perceived as riskier than texting in talking to relationships. Karen said:

I think with guys it shows that they care a lot a lot more if they pick up the phone.

Because I feel that texting goes a lot with hooking up. It's so funny even like getting those, I mean my friends have gotten those, and it's just like, 'Okay if you're not going to even pick up the phone, clearly your intentions aren't something I want to be involved with.'

Similarly, Ellen talked about how she knew her current boyfriend really liked her when he called instead of texted. During this discussion, the following exchange occurred:

Ellen: I thought it was so cool because he actually wanted to go on a date and actually called just to talk, but most guys they don't go for a phone call or date.

Interviewer: So did the calling give you any kind indication about how interested he was in you?

Ellen: Yeah, I thought that he was interested. I mean like genuinely interested instead of just being a guy trying to hookup. It was first semester freshman year and I had kind of met a few guys and all they wanted to do was that, yeah, and I was kind of giving up on guys and then he actually took the initiative and I could tell he really liked me because he did want to hang out and stuff. And actually take me out.

Interviewer: So a phone call demonstrates more caring?

Ellen: Mhmm. Because if you've never called someone before, you're probably going to be sitting there thinking about what you're going to say and a lot more thought goes into a phone call. And I think anyone knows that. If they get a phone call, it's like, obviously this person has thought about what they're going to say more than if they just text you. I mean, he's putting thought into what he's going to say, and cares a lot more. It's a little more intimate to hear someone's voice.

Susie concurred with Rae, Karen and Ellen. Susie said:

Now days people don't call as much, but I tend to call if I need to say something really quick and I don't want to text it out but I mean if a guy that I was interested in were to call me and just to talk and not for a long time I would be pretty impressed because now guys will just text, "Hey what's up?" The text message thing is what most everyone does so if he were to call it would show me that he definitely was interested.

Bella talked about how her understanding of the differences in symbolic meaning between texting and phone developed over time. When talking about how to tell if a man is romantically interested the following conversation occurred, Bella said, "I was so naïve when I was a Freshman. I was like, 'Oh! He's texting me. He's into me!' But no. That's what I thought that he's contacting me he must be interested." When asked what she thought texting means now, she replied, "That they want to hookup."

Facebook wall posts (FbWP) in dating relationships were also viewed symbolically. Often students argued that these displays seemed disingenuous, largely because of the public nature of the statements. Jane had strong feelings about this topic. When asked about affectionate wall posts, she said:

I think its bullshit. Like you're in a relationship, I know you guys see each other all the time. I know you guys call or text all the time and you go out because you're in a relationship and if you're in the same town then you don't have to write on each other's walls like that just makes it seem like you're obsessive and you don't have time for your friends. Because, when you're in a relationship you still have to be who you are they should compliment you they shouldn't take you away. I just feel like those who write on each other's walls are insecure or immature.

When asked what other motivations might be behind the affectionate wall postings, she said:

Maybe they feel like they're in love and need to show it, but if you see each other all the time already then why waste your time on Facebook. I just think it is kind of silly and kind of gross, kind of like the whole lets kiss in front of people while they're trying to walk into [a university building] like move to the side and don't get in front of me I'm just trying to go to class.

Affectionate FbWPs were often compared to offline public displays of affection. When asked about way he thought his ex-girlfriend used to post on his wall so often, Roger said:

Probably to make sure all the girls stayed away. I don't know. Just to like claim her property. You know like when guys and girls walk sometimes they hold hands being like, "This girl is mine."

Anna also argued that affectionate FbWP were used to let other potential rivals know to back off. She said:

I think it's kind of weird when I see boyfriend and girlfriend writing on each other's wall. It's like, you see them all the time, I don't know why you have to say this for the public to see.

When asked why she thought people engaged in these kinds of public displays, Anna said:

I don't know. I think it might just be – well my boyfriend's roommate, his girlfriend writes on his wall all the time and I think it's just kind of a back-off thing to other girls. It's just kind of show-me-how-much-you-care right in front of people thing.

In this way, the FbWP meant more than just the words. It was seen as a signal to others that the person was taken. The public nature of FbWP increased the importance of messages posted.

However, precisely because they were public, participants were not convinced of the sincerity of

the message. Not only was medium choice important, so were characteristics of the message sent.

Symbolic meaning of message characteristics. In addition to the symbolic meaning of media choice, participants also reported relying on message characteristics as indications of relational (dis)interest. As is the case with many forms of mediated communication, the college students in this sample made the most of the cues available to them when attempting to decipher the motivations of their objects of affection. This subtheme encompasses four parts: message length, response lag, message frequency, and time of day the message is sent. Students relied on these messages characteristics as additional sources of information that indicated their partners' interest level.

Message length. The amount of words or letters a message contained was an important marker of relational interest for these college students. Jane, for example, said:

Length shows that they're taking their time, their interested, its not like a quick, "Yeah, that's what I am doing." Length shows that they care more about their message. If they give you like detail and like talk to you [that's good], but if they are like, "Yeah. Ok." and short then that definitely sends a message that they're just responding to respond.

Jack also thought that the one word response was troubling. He said, "It's [the one word response] bad. It doesn't cut off the ability to ask something else, it means the door may be closing but it's not shut." Chelsea concurred:

If they're just one wording you then it's like they don't want to talk to you much. So the longer the message probably the more they're interested in you, it doesn't have to be like a page long but just give you more details.

Ben argued that it was important to mirror the other's level of interest, by roughly matching the length of the text messages they send, so that he could avoid looking desperate. He said:

You can kind of judge off of how they text. Like if they send long messages maybe you can send long messages back, but if they are sending like a couple words then you don't want to send them like a chapter.

Students were so attuned to the symbolic meaning of message length that they were actively manipulating it in order to save face.

Response lag. Much as they would use short messages to indicate non-interest, they would also use the time lapsed between receiving a message and sending a reply in order to send relational messages. Paul was especially clear about the importance of time lag. He said:

If I am just going to be completely straight with you, the time distance that it takes for someone to return a text, it really plays an important component, to me at least because if it is long periods of time, it is either they are not interested or they aren't into their phone which usually isn't the case with girls. But, I mean, you know if they respond, you know fairly quickly and they continue to respond you can tell they are into it.

Bella said she could tell how interested a man was based upon the amount of time it took to respond:

I know the guys have a rule of don't text or contact for three days, but my opinion, like my boyfriend contacted me immediately and he says you know do it immediately if you like the girl. But honestly I would say if the guy doesn't contact you within a week then just delete his number.

Jane had similar thoughts. For her, if she had hooked up with a man [in her case making out, but not intercourse] and he was texting her for the first time after a week had gone by, it meant he was only interested in hooking up. She said:

Sometimes it's not the next day [the first text], sometimes its next weekend and they're like hey what are you doing and you're like, 'Wow. You haven't talked to me for like a week.' and you're just like, no. That means they're just bored, looking for someone to hang out with and they know they've already hooked up with you once; they can probably hookup with you again.

However, Jane thought that a text later the same night she met a guy was a promising sign. She said:

A text like later that night and he could be like hey did you get home ok, something like that. That means like more commitment than the average college guy you meet at the bar, like that means they're actually interested in hanging out again.

However, both men and women said that they had purposefully delayed responding to a text because they did not want to appear desperate. Mark, for example, was delighted to receive a text after hanging out with his current girlfriend for the first time, he said, "I was like, 'Oh, okay she's interested!'" However, he did not want to appear overly eager, so he purposefully delayed his response to avoid giving the impression he was waiting by the phone for her text, which he was. Mark continued:

So I'll get the text and I'll sit there and won't respond right away [laughter]. Well, you know, even though I kind of wanted to, I didn't want her to think I was waiting for her text me. I wanted to seem like I was busy, so I waited 5 to 10 minutes.

This pause, enabled by the asynchronicity of text messaging, also allowed Mark to better control the face he presented to his romantic interest. This practice is roughly akin to the much practiced, but relatively understudied, phenomenon of waiting a few rings to answer the phone so as not to appear desperate (see Sarch, 1993 for a discussion of telephone use during courtship).

Message frequency. In addition to the time lag between contact, *message frequency* was also important. Sending too many messages was over-eager, verging on what the students call “creepy” behavior. In the context of phone use, being a creeper is associated with too much, unwanted, contact with a potential romantic interest. Bob said:

I mean I feel like texting is so sure and fool-proof that you can’t really go wrong with it unless you are really creepy. Like if they don’t respond and you keep texting, it’s like over-texting.

Ben agreed:

Like I mean if they don’t seem interested just yet, like you don’t want to do too much, because you don’t want to seem like needy, you don’t want to be texting too much. Like if they are sending you like one word/ two word messages back, don’t keep sending messages, like maybe that’s too much.

Jason argued that sending more than one text without a response was a sign of desperation.

When asked if you should send another text before receiving a response, he said:

Jason: That is a horrible idea.

Interviewer: Why? What happens if you send the follow up text?

Jason: You just don’t do it. You might, you look desperate and I- I try to avoid that at all costs.

Interviewer: What is so bad about looking desperate or looking over-eager?

Jason: It's a sign of maybe not being desirable, I think because obviously if you're not desirable you have nothing else going for you so why should the other person be interested?

Jane agreed that multiple messages could be problematic. She said:

Yeah if you don't respond and they text you again. I had a guy and I only hung out with him like one time and I would not respond right away and I would have like 4 text messages from him and I was like, "Whoa buddy!" and now we're like friends which is kind of weird because he is still a little bit awkward, but I was like, "No. Not going to happen."

Time of day. Finally, students discussed the importance of the *time of day* the message is sent. Matt argued that after 10 pm, text messages indicate the sender is only interested in sex. He explained that if his interested in a girl he would need to send a text before it gets too late. He said, "It would come off as a hookup. Maybe that's not what they mean but if it's later [the message] it comes off that way." Chelsea agreed. She said:

If they are texting you more at night then it's more of like a booty call thing, and if they are texting you throughout the day it's more like a hey I like you we should hang out more.

Lindy concurred with Matt and Chelsea. She also felt that the late night text implied a purely sexual interest. Lindy said:

The 6 p.m. text is like "Hey, what are you doing later?" like "I want to spend time with you." The 2 in the morning one is like "Hey, I just spent time with all these other people but I didn't get any from them but I want to get something from you so I'm going to text you."

Emma nicely summarizes how small cues in mediated communication are important. She said:

You know you can tell if someone likes you or if they don't because their message is longer than your message or shorter than your message. So I was like is it a short statement? Does he not reply? Or is it long? What time of day did he send it? All these things matter.

It is clear from their talk that college students are relying on the nonverbal characteristics of mediated messages in order to gauge the interest level of the other. This process of making meaning from small cues also helps guide the way that they encode messages. By understanding the meanings of message characteristics that are shared, college students can manipulate their messages to try to claim their desired image. However, their preoccupation with reading additional meaning into message characteristics waned as the relationship developed. Jim explained:

I think there is less need to in a way, I don't know that could be bad, but I think you just grow comfortable with the person and you figure out what their style is and in a way it is actually easier to pick up when they do something different. But I don't think you're really reading between the lines and there is no need to send messages that are needed to be read through the lines because you don't have to deal with all the bullshit anymore.

Like Jim, Bella thought that when two people were officially dating, message composition became less strained. She said:

You wouldn't [if you were dating] be worried as much about sounding too, "Hey! I want a relationship!" or too, "Hey. I want to be just friends." Because you worry about that [early on], like, "Oh, maybe I should change this word I don't want to sound freaky." So

you [when dating] don't have to worry as much or as often it's just easier to do. The pressures off you're already in. You're good.

It seems to be only in stages characterized by high relational uncertainty that these young adults felt they needed to think strategically about the communication medium employed. However, much of the meaning participants read into the frequency of contact, the medium use, and the message itself were dependent upon relational development.

Chapter Summary

Through the analysis of semi-structured interviews, this chapter addressed RQ1 - RQ4. When talking about their romantic/sexual relationships, college students used four terms: talking to, hanging out, dating, and hooking up. Talking to means the individuals are interested in pursuing a relationship, but does not imply exclusivity. Hanging out is a step beyond talking to, but still does not involve full-on dating. Dating typically refers to a committed, monogamous romantic relationship, while hooking up refers to an un-committed, not exclusive, sexual relationship. These terms denote identifiable, if somewhat ambiguous, types of college student relationships.

Within these types, college students seem to engage in patterned PCT use. Students were most likely to communicate with their partners within dating relationships and least likely to communicate within hooking up. They were most likely to report using texting as a way to communicate within talking to, hanging out, and hooking up, however, within dating, there does not seem to be a difference between texting and phoning. These basic patterns were modified by the communicative acts the participants hoped to accomplish: micro-coordination, arranging plans, flirting, long conversation, or just chatting.

Students were more likely to just chat or to have a long conversation within dating relationships, primarily because contacting their partners when talking to or hanging out without a clear purpose was face threatening. Unlike micro-coordination and arranging plans, students reported that just chatting and having a long conversation are communicative acts without a clear goal. Students also reported using texting and Facebook chat as ways to flirt with potential romantic partners.

In the early stages (talking to and hanging out) students rely heavily on media affordances of lean media, especially texting, in order to present a confident and desirable face. This need was not as great in dating relationships because participants were less uncertain about their partner's feelings when in committed, monogamous relationships. Students also reported manipulating the meaning that message characteristics convey by delaying their response to the other's message or by texting late in the day to indicate purely sexual interest. Because phoning symbolized increased romantic interest, phone calls just to chat were primarily reserved for dating relationship, would be seen as 'creepy' in talking to or hanging out relationships, and would not happen in hookup relationships.

In order to more fully answer RQ2, the basic patterns of PCT use within romantic/sexual relationships uncovered by the qualitative interviews were used as the basis for constructing a survey. The survey enabled these patterns to be examined in a larger sample. For example, the interviews suggest that within in talking to relationships students were more likely to use text messaging to contact their romantic/sexual partners than they were to use other types of media. The survey will allow for the (dis)confirmation of this and other patterns of PCT use. The content and results of this survey are reported in the next chapter.

Chapter Four: Survey and Quantitative Results

This chapter presents the quantitative portion of this study. It addresses the definitions for relational microtypes (RQ1) and how PCT use is patterned across those relational microtypes (RQ2). This chapter describes the structure, analysis, and results of the online survey developed from the descriptive interview results. The survey was designed to examine the extent to which the definitions of the relational microtypes and the patterns of PCT use identified from the interview data were shared by a larger sample of college students from the same population (Creswell, 2009).

In brief, the interview data indicated that college students used four terms to describe their romantic/sexual relationships: talking to, hanging out, dating, and hooking up. Talking to designates an interest in pursuing a relationship with the other person, but does not imply exclusivity. Hanging out suggests a growing relationship, but still does not involve exclusivity. dating typically refers to a committed, monogamous romantic relationship, while hooking up refers to an un-committed, non-exclusive, sexual relationship. These terms denote identifiable, if somewhat ambiguous, types of college student relationships. Within these relational types, the interview data suggested that college students engage in patterned PCT use behavior that varied with the relational microtype and the reasons or reasons they had for contacting their partners (i.e., microcoordination, arranging plans, flirting, long conversations, and just chatting). Overall, students in the interviews reported using email, instant messaging (IM), Facebook Chat (FbC), Facebook messaging (FbM), Facebook wall posts (FbWP), texting and phoning within their romantic/sexual relationships.

Taking into account PCT use within relational microtype and communication purpose, the following patterns emerged:

1. Interviewees were more likely to text than to use any other communication medium within relationships they defined as talking to, hanging out, and hooking up. However, within dating relationships they were equally likely to contact each other through phone calls or text messaging. Because of the concerns about privacy, students did not often use FbWP with their partners. This was especially true when hooking up. Regardless of relational microtype, interviewees were least likely to use email, followed closely by IMing.

2. Students were more likely to text message their partner with no clear goal (i.e., to just chat and to have a long conversation) when dating than when talking to, hanging out, or hooking up. They were least likely to do so in hooking up relationships. Interviewees also indicated that they were equally likely to text to micro-coordinate or to arrange plans when dating, hanging out, and talking to and least likely in hooking up.

3. The participants were most likely to call their partners within dating relationships and least likely to call within hookup relationships. The qualitative findings were more ambiguous about contact within hanging out and talking to relationships. However, if hanging out does denote a relational type that is more serious than talking to, then participants reporting about hanging out relationships should be more likely to call than those in talking to relationships. Additionally, interviewees indicated that in talking to, hanging out, and hooking up relationships they were especially unlikely to call without a specific purpose (e.g., just chat), but were more likely to make short phone calls to arrange plans or micro-coordinate.

4. In the interviews, students indicated that Facebook use often decreased within dating relationships. They were more likely to communicate via FbC and FbM when talking to and hanging out than when dating.

Method

The survey focused on examining college students' likelihood to communicate using different PCTs (email, IM, FbC, FbM, FbWP, texting, phoning) within the four relationship microtypes (talking to, hanging out, dating and hooking up) for five different reasons (micro-coordination, arranging plans, flirting, having a long conversation, and just chatting).

Participants. Participants were 120 students (M age = 19.73, SD = 2.14, range = 18-31) in introductory communication courses at a large Midwestern university. As in the interviews, students had to be at least 18 years of age and American citizens to participate. Participants were required to be American in order to ensure that normative college courtship practices were captured. Participants satisfied a course research credit requirement by completing the survey. The sample included 55 men (45.8 percent) and 65 women (54.2 percent). The majority (88%) of the participants identified their race or ethnic background as white (N = 107), seven (6%) as African-American, four (3%) as Hispanic/Mexican-American, two (2%) as Asian/Pacific Islanders, one (.5%) as Arab-American, and one (.5%) as White/West Indian. One hundred seventeen (97.5%) identified as heterosexual.

Participants reported having an average of 1.85 (SD = 1.38) serious relationships and 4.15 (SD = 4.44) casual relationships. Eighty-five percent of students had hooked up at least once, whereas 15% had never hooked up. Participants were also asked to indicate how they had met their most recent serious, casual, and hookup relational partners. Results are presented in Table 3. They indicated that for each relationship type (serious, casual, and hookup) they had met their most recent partner through mutual friends. Additionally, participants reported having sexual intercourse with an average of 4.64 (SD = 6.09) people. Finally, of the participants, 52 were currently in a romantic relationship.

Table 3: Frequency (Percent) of How Participants Met Most Recent Partner

How They Met	Relationship Type		
	Serious	Casual	Hookup
Mutual Friends	51 (42.5%)	53 (44.2%)	40 (33.3%)
In Class	24 (20%)	28 (23.3%)	15 (12.5%)
Randomly at a bar	0 (0%)	5 (4.2%)	17 (14.2%)
Randomly at a party	6 (5%)	11 (9.2%)	20 (16.7%)
Online Dating Service	1 (.91%)	2 (1.8%)	0 (0%)
On a Social Networking Site	2 (1.8%)	2 (1.8%)	0 (0%)
Work	9 (8.2%)	4 (3.65%)	2 (1.8%)
Dorm	4 (3.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Other	13 (11.8%)	9 (7.9%)	8 (7.8%)
Total	110 (100%) ^a	114 (100%) ^b	102 (100%) ^c

Note. ^a10 participants reported never having a serious relationship; ^b6 participants reported never having a casual relationship; ^c18 participants reported never hooking up; *N* = 120

Participants were asked to indicate how often they used each PCT. Results are presented in Table 4. Daily use was highest for texts, followed by social networking sites (*N* = 118 using Facebook), cell phone calls, and email. Reported use was lowest for IM, with 40 percent (*N* = 48) never using it. Eighty-four percent of participants went onto a social network site daily, with most (*N* = 118) using Facebook. When queried about cell phone use, nearly eighty percent (*N* = 93) reported that they make cell phone calls daily and ninety-nine percent (*N* = 119) reported sending text messages daily.

Table 4: Frequency (Percent) of Media Use

Frequency of Use	Media Type				
	Email	IM	Social Network Sites	Cell Phone Calls	Text Messages
Never	1 (.8%)	48 (40%)	1 (.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Less than Once a Month	0 (0%)	6 (5%)	1 (.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Once a Month	1 (.8%)	2 (1.7%)	1 (.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
2-3 times a Month	3 (2.5%)	5 (4.2%)	2 (1.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Once a week	4 (3.3%)	7 (5.8%)	2 (1.7%)	4 (3.3%)	0 (0%)
2-3 times a Week	23 (19.2%)	22 (18.3%)	12 (10%)	23 (19.2%)	1 (.8%)
Daily	88 (73.3%)	30 (25%)	101 (84.2%)	93 (77.5%)	119 (99.2%)
Total	120 (100%)	120 (100%)	120 (100%)	120 (100%)	120 (100%)

Survey design. The survey was developed on the basis of the qualitative findings described in Chapter Three. It was organized into three sections as described below. The full survey is presented in Appendix D.

Section 1: Term check: relational microtypes. To examine the extent to which the definitions of the four relational microtypes were shared by the respondents, the survey began with a series of questions about respondents' familiarity with the relational microtype terms identified in the qualitative study. For each term (talking to, hanging out, dating, and hooking up), participants were asked to respond YES or NO to the following three statements: I am familiar with this term; I think most college students agree about what this term means; I use this term when talking about relationships. They were also asked to provide an open-ended definition for each relational microtype.

Section 2: Patterns of PCT use. To examine patterns of PCT use in romantic relationships, the survey included three independent variables: PCT medium, relationship microtype, and communication act. PCT medium had seven levels: email, IM, FbC, FbM, FbWP, text message, and phone call. Relationship microtype refers to the terms students used to describe their romantic/sexual relationships and had four levels: talking to hanging out, dating, and hooking up. Finally, communication act is the reason for initiating contact and had five levels: micro-coordination, arranging plans, flirting, having a long conversation, and just chatting.

The dependent variable (DV) was communication likelihood. It was assessed by asking participants to rate on a 1 (not at all) to 7 (most of the time) scale the likelihood that they would use a specific PCT within each of the four relational microtypes for each of the five communication purposes. Communication likelihood was selected as the DV because it is often

difficult, if not impossible, for participants to recall exactly how many times they have engaged in an everyday behavior. By asking participants about their likelihood of using PCTs within relational microtypes for specific purposes, the survey enabled the measurement of underlying social norms, instead of participants' perhaps less than accurate recollections of actual media use. The focus on normative behavior also allowed for the inclusion of students not currently in romantic relationships because those participants could also report about what they believed they would do in a given relational microtype.

The three independent variables were organized in a within-subjects design so that participants indicated their likelihood of using each medium within each relational microtype for each communication purpose. Section 2 of the survey was presented to participants in 7 parts, one for each medium. The 7 parts were varied so that each participant would report about the media in a different, random order. Within each section participants responded to a set of questions that examined their likelihood to communicate within a given relational microtype for each communicative act.

Section 3: Participant characteristics. Demographic and descriptive information about participants was gathered with a series of questions about their age, sex, and relational history. The latter questions included the number of serious and casual relationships they have had, the number of hookups they have participated in, and their current relational status.

Survey pilot. Thirty students in an upper level communication theory course were presented with the survey and asked to complete it as part of a larger class discussion about relationship and technology use. These students were asked to assess the extent to which they understood the terms that were being used on the survey, to indicate if there were sections that should be revised, and to make any other comments about the survey content. After this process,

the survey was discussed as a class. In light of their comments and the discussion, the original terms from the qualitative study were retained. The students had similar interpretations of the terms as did those in the qualitative study. They also felt the survey captured PCT use in college romantic/sexual relationships.

Survey Procedure. Participants were recruited from undergraduate communication studies courses at a large Midwestern public university. Per departmental policy, students in the basic communication course are required to and receive course credit for participation in communication research. Students are notified when studies are available through a Blackboard announcement. This announcement directed the students to the survey via an online link. Here, they were presented with an information statement about the study and their rights as participants. By continuing past the information page they confirmed that they were at least 18 years old.

Results

Relational microtypes: Familiarity, use, agreement. In order to assess participants' familiarity with and use of the relational terms identified in the interview analysis, a series of chi-square analyses evaluated the following questions: "I am familiar with this term," "I use this term when talking about relationships," and "I think most college students agree about the meaning of this term," for each relational microtype (talking to, hanging out, dating, and hooking up).

So few participants indicated that they were unfamiliar with the four terms that there was insufficient variability to run a chi-square test of independence. A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit was performed to determine whether students were using the terms (talking to, hanging out, dating, hooking up) when discussing their relationships. Results indicated that participants were

significantly more likely to use each of the terms than to not use them (see Table 5). A chi-square test of goodness-of-fit was also performed to determine if the participants thought there was definitional agreement about the terms (talking to, hanging out, dating, hooking up) among college students. Results indicated that for each microtype significantly more participants thought there was agreement than did not (see Table 5).

Table 5: Microtype Familiarity, Use, & Agreement: Frequency (Percent) of Yes/No Responses

Microtype	Q1: I am familiar with this term			Q2: I use this term			Q3: I think students agree		
	Yes	No	χ^2	Yes	No	χ^2	Yes	No	χ^2
Talking to	118 (98.3%)	2 (.2%)	*	87 (72.5%)	33 (27.5%)	24.3 ^a	108 (90.0%)	12 (10.0%)	76.8 ^a
Hanging out	119 (99.2%)	1 (.01%)	*	90 (75.0%)	30 (25.0%)	30.0 ^a	112 (93.3%)	8 (.6%)	90.1 ^a
Dating	120 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	*	119 (99.2%)	1 (.01%)	*	108 (90.0%)	12 (10.0%)	79.1 ^a
Hooking up	120 (100%)	0 (0.0%)	*	108 (90%)	12 (10.0%)	76.8 ^a	98 (81.6%)	22 (18.3%)	48.1 ^a

Note. *Insufficient variability to run chi-square test of independence; ^ap < .001; N=120

Relational microtypes: Definitions. Using the definitions generated by the qualitative analysis, participants' definitions for each relational microtype (talking to, hanging out, dating, and hooking up) were examined for agreement (see Table 6). While participants consistently defined talking to (N = 101, 84.2%), dating (N = 94, 81.2) and hooking up (111, 92.5%) in ways that fit with the study definitions, their definitions for hanging out were multiple and inconsistent. Therefore, after the definitions for hanging out were coded for agreement, those remaining were examined separately for reoccurring themes. Themes were identified based upon single words or phrases that were used, nearly verbatim, by two or more participants (Owen, 1984). This uncovered a third possible definition for hanging out: time spent with another person engaged in an informal activity (e.g. watching a movie at home) that might lead to a sexual encounter. Of the 120 participants, 18 (15%) reported defining hanging out in this way.

Table 6: Relational Microtype Definitions and Frequency (Percent) of Occurrence

Relational microtypes	Definition	Occurrence
Talking to	An individual is interested in pursuing a romantic relationship with another. They engage in behaviors (spending time together and texting) that could lead to a monogamous romantic relationship, but are not yet exclusive.	101 (84.2%)
Hanging out	(a) Spending time together, regardless of relationship type.	(a) 44 (36.7%)
	(b) Denotes a relationship that is more serious than talking to, but does not imply exclusivity.	(b) 31 (25.8%)
	(c) Time spent with another person engaged in an informal activity (e.g. watching a movie at home) that might lead to a sexual encounter.*	(c) 18 (15%)
Dating	A long-term, committed, and monogamous relationship.	98 (81.2%)
Hooking up	Sexual activity, ranging from heavy petting to sexual intercourse, that occurs without the promise of commitment.	111 (92.5%)

Note. * Added on the basis of analysis of participants' definitions.

Patterns of PCT use. A repeated measures multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the effect of communication medium (7), relational microtype (4), and communication act (5) on likelihood to communicate. The dependent variable was a communication use likelihood rating of 1 (not at all) to 7 (most of the time). Mauchly's test indicated that the assumption of sphericity had been violated for all within subjects factors (medium: $\chi^2 = 63.39, p < .000, \varepsilon = .84$; relational microtype: $\chi^2 = 48.38, p < .000, \varepsilon = .81$; communication act: $\chi^2 = 56.17, p < .000, \varepsilon = .80$). Therefore, multivariate tests are reported (see O'Brien & Kaiser, 1985). The medium main effect was significant, $V = .91, F(6, 114) = 187.40, p < .000, \eta^2 = .91$, as were the main effects of relational microtype, $V = .45, F(3, 117) = 32.18, p$

$< .000$, $\eta^2 = .45$, and communication act $V = .61$, $F(4, 116) = 46.21$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .61$.

Significant interaction effects were also detected. All 2-way interaction effects were significant: medium X relational microtype, $V = .72$, $F(18, 102) = 14.79$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .72$; medium X communication activity, $V = .76$, $F(24, 96) = 12.81$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .76$, and relational microtype X Act, $V = .52$, $F(12, 108) = 9.65$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .52$. Finally, the three-way interaction effect was significant: medium X relational microtype X communication activity, $V = .76$, $F(72, 48) = 2.15$, $p < .01$, $\eta^2 = .76$.

Main effects. The MANOVA indicated that there was a significant main effect of medium on likelihood to communicate, $V = .91$, $F(6, 114) = 187.40$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .91$. A Bonferroni post hoc test (see Fields, 2008) revealed that all media types, with the exception of IM and FbWP, differed significantly from each other, with participants being more likely to send a text message to a partner than to contact them using any other type of media. They were least likely to contact their partner using email (see Table 7).

A significant main effect for relational microtype on likelihood to communicate was also detected, $V = .45$, $F(3, 117) = 32.18$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .45$. A Bonferroni post hoc test revealed that participants were more likely to communicate with their partner when they were in dating relationships than if they were in talking to, hanging out or hooking up relationships. Participants were least likely to contact their partner when hooking up. Likelihood to communicate did not differ significantly between talking to and hanging out relationships (see Table 8).

There was also a significant main effect for communication act, $V = .61$, $F(4, 116) = 46.21$, $p < .000$, $\eta^2 = .61$. A Bonferroni post hoc test indicated that participants were most likely to contact a partner in order to arrange plans or to flirt (see Table 9).

Table 7: Mean and Standard Deviation for Main Effect of Media

Medium	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Text Messaging	5.65 ^a	1.02
Phone Calling	4.52 ^b	1.23
Facebook Chat	3.68 ^c	1.40
Facebook Messaging	3.06 ^d	1.43
Facebook Wall Posts	2.56 ^e	1.19
Instant Messaging	2.23 ^e	1.69
Email	1.55 ^f	1.15

Note. Different subscripts indicate that means differ significantly at $p < .000$.

Table 8: Mean and Standard Deviation for Main Effect of Microtype

Medium	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Dating	3.76 ^a	.79
Talking To	3.38 ^b	.85
Hanging Out	3.24 ^b	1.03
Hooking Up	2.90 ^c	1.07

Note. Different subscripts indicate that means differ significantly at $p < .05$.

Table 9: Mean and Standard Deviation for Main Effect of Communication Act

Medium	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Arranging Plans	3.64 ^a	.88
Flirting	3.52 ^{ab}	.88
Just Chat	3.47 ^b	.94
Long Conversation	3.08 ^c	.94
MicroCoordination	2.89 ^c	.88

Note. Different subscripts indicate that means differ significantly at $p < .01$.

Interaction effects. Each of these main effects was qualified by the significant interaction effects. The decomposition of the interactions will focus on the three-way interaction of medium, relationship, and communication activity only incorporating the two-way interactions when useful to understanding the patterns.

Two steps were involved in the analysis of the three-way interaction. First, the two-way interaction between communication medium and relational microtype was investigated by a MANOVA that examined the simple effects of medium within each level of relational microtype. Based upon the results of this MANOVA, follow-up pairwise comparisons were

conducted as appropriate. Second, a series of MANOVAs examined the simple effects of relational microtype within each level of PCT medium and communication activity. Based upon the results of these MANOVAs, follow-up pairwise comparisons to determine the simple, simple effects were conducted as appropriate. Because of the increased power to detect differences when using a within subjects design (Cohen, 2002; Fields, 2008), the analyses detected statistically significant mean differences smaller than four tenths of a point.

Interaction of medium and relational microtype. Results of the MANOVA examining the interaction of medium and relational microtype revealed that medium had a significant effect on likelihood of use within all levels of relational microtype (See Table 10). To further decompose the interaction, the appropriate pairwise comparisons were conducted with Bonferroni adjustments employed to control for familywise error (see Fields, 2008).

Table 10: Effect of Medium within Relational Microtype

Relational Microtype	V	F
Talking To	.88*	133.84
Hanging Out	.87*	127.53
Dating	.92*	207.10
Hooking Up	.81*	83.42

Note. * significant at $p < .001$

Within talking to, hanging out, and hooking up relationships participants were significantly more likely to text than to use any other medium (see Table 11). Participants reported being highly, and equally, likely to text and phone within dating relationships. In general, talking to, hanging out, and hooking up followed the same pattern, with two exceptions: (1) while students were equally likely to use the phone and FbC within talking to and hanging out relationships, they were significantly more likely to phone than to use FbC when hanging out; and (2) while students were more likely to use FbM than FbWP when talking to and hooking

up, they were equally likely to use them when hanging out. Within dating relationships, participants were significantly more likely to use FbC than they were to use four other media (FbM, FbWP, IM and email). Email was least likely to be used within all microtypes (talking to, hanging out, dating, and hooking up). The cell means for likelihood of use were below the midpoint for email, IM, FbM and FbWP. Only texting, phoning, and FbC had likelihood scores above the midpoint.

Table 11: Mean (SD) of Likelihood to Communicate within Communicative Act

	Relational Microtype			
	Talking To	Hanging Out	Dating	Hooking Up
Text	5.80 (1.24) ^a	5.46 (1.39) ^a	6.15 (1.15) ^a	5.17 (1.69) ^a
Phone	4.32 (1.53) ^b	4.25 (1.52) ^b	5.97 (1.26) ^a	3.53 (1.85) ^b
FbC	3.92 (1.53) ^b	3.71 (1.51) ^c	3.85 (1.82) ^b	3.23 (1.65) ^b
FbM	3.27 (1.49) ^c	2.95 (1.45) ^d	3.25 (1.86) ^c	2.76 (1.69) ^c
FbWP	2.59 (1.22) ^d	2.60 (1.25) ^{de}	2.85 (1.56) ^{cd}	2.21 (1.46) ^d
IM	2.22 (1.24) ^d	2.21 (1.69) ^e	2.48 (2.09) ^d	2.00 (1.56) ^d
Email	1.56 (1.75) ^e	1.52 (1.19) ^f	1.76 (1.43) ^e	1.37 (1.15) ^e

Note. Different subscripts within each column indicate that means differed significantly at $p < .01$.

Interaction of medium, communication act, and relational microtype. Results of the series of MANOVAs examining the three-way interaction revealed that relational microtype had a significant effect on likelihood of use within all combinations of medium and act with only three exceptions: the use of e-mail for microcoordination, FbC for microcoordination, and FbM for microcoordination (See Table 12). To further decompose the interaction, the appropriate pairwise comparisons were conducted with Bonferroni adjustments employed to control for familywise error (see Fields, 2008).

Texting. Participants reported being significantly more likely to text in order to have long conversations or to just chat within dating relationships than in the other three types of relationships (see Table 13). For the other three acts (microcoordination, arranging plans, and flirting), participants were significantly more likely to text in dating than in hooking up relationships. In general, the likelihood of texting for each of the communication acts was similar in talking to and hanging out relationships, and, with the exception of flirting, least likely in hooking up relationships.

Table 12: Mean (SD) of Likelihood to Communicate using Texting within Microtype and Communicative Act

Relational Microtype	Communication Purpose				
	Micro	Plans	Flirt	Long Convo	Just Chat
Dating	6.36 (1.19) ^a	6.36 (1.23) ^a	6.26 (1.25) ^a	5.45 (2.11) ^a	6.34 (1.28) ^a
Talking To	6.03 (1.50) ^{ab}	6.19 (1.27) ^{ab}	6.03 (1.57) ^{ab}	4.89 (2.13) ^b	5.87 (1.52) ^b
Hanging Out	5.92 (1.53) ^{bc}	5.97 (1.40) ^{bc}	5.30 (1.92) ^c	4.69 (2.03) ^{bc}	5.41 (1.77) ^c
Hooking Up	5.57 (1.91) ^c	5.63 (1.84) ^c	5.63 (1.76) ^b	4.22 (2.23) ^c	4.83 (2.15) ^d

Note. Different subscripts within each column indicate that means differed significantly at $p < .01$.

Phone. Participants reported being significantly more likely to call their partner within dating relationships than in the other relational microtypes (see Table 14). In general, the likelihood of calling for each of the communication acts was similar within talking to and hanging out relationships. With the exception of flirting, they were least likely to communicate by phone in hooking up relationships.

Table 13: Mean (SD) of Likelihood to Communicate using Phone Calls within Microtype and Communicative Act

Relational Microtype	Communication Purpose				
	Micro	Plans	Flirt	Long Convo	Just Chat
Dating	6.15 (1.39) ^a	6.25 (1.22) ^a	5.35 (1.96) ^a	6.18 (1.46) ^a	5.93 (1.56) ^a
Talking To	4.73 (1.81) ^b	4.74 (1.74) ^b	3.63 (1.92) ^b	4.50 (1.97) ^b	4.02 (1.92) ^b
Hanging Out	4.96 (1.77) ^b	4.72 (1.76) ^b	3.48 (1.85) ^b	4.19 (1.91) ^{bc}	3.92 (1.85) ^b
Hooking Up	4.16 (2.16) ^c	3.83 (1.92) ^c	3.46 (2.08) ^b	3.09 (1.99) ^c	3.08 (1.90) ^c

Note. Different subscripts within each column indicate that means differed significantly at $p < .05$.

Facebook Chat. Participants were equally likely to use FbC for each of the communication acts, with two exceptions: FbC use was significantly more likely within talking

to relationships than hanging out relationships when flirting and just chatting (see Table 15).

Participants were significantly less likely to use FbC within hooking up relationship than in the other three relationships types for two activities (just chat and long conversation).

Table 14: Mean (SD) of Likelihood to Communicate using FbC within Microtype and Communicative Act

	Communication Purpose				
	Micro	Plans	Flirt	Long Convo	Just Chat
Relational Microtype					
Dating	2.48 (2.15) ^{NS}	4.06 (2.13) ^{ab}	4.38 (2.14) ^{ab}	3.80 (2.18) ^a	4.51 (2.06) ^{ab}
Talking To	2.35 (1.95) ^{NS}	4.23 (1.88) ^a	4.48 (1.85) ^a	3.87 (1.90) ^a	4.68 (1.82) ^a
Hanging Out	2.43 (1.96) ^{NS}	4.18 (1.82) ^a	3.97 (1.93) ^b	3.62 (1.94) ^a	4.35 (1.90) ^b
Hooking Up	2.23 (1.93) ^{NS}	3.63 (1.99) ^b	4.00 (2.05) ^b	2.92 (1.88) ^b	3.53 (2.17) ^c

Note. Different subscripts within each column indicate that means differed significantly at $p < .05$.

Facebook Messaging. Participants reported being significantly more likely to FbM within talking to relationships than they were in hanging out and hooking up relationship to each of the communication acts, with the exception of arranging plans (see Table 16). They were also more likely to FbM within dating relationships than hooking up relationships for three acts (flirting, long conversation, and just chatting).

Table 15: Mean (SD) of Likelihood to Communicate using FbM within Microtype and Communicative Act

	Communication Purpose				
	Micro	Plans	Flirt	Long Convo	Just Chat
Relational Microtype					
Dating	2.13 (1.97) ^{NS}	3.51 (2.07) ^{NS}	3.71 (2.04) ^{ab}	3.31 (2.13) ^a	3.59 (2.16) ^{ab}
Talking To	2.09 (1.75) ^{NS}	3.66 (1.76) ^{NS}	3.76 (1.83) ^a	3.23 (1.86) ^a	3.59 (1.87) ^a
Hanging Out	1.93 (1.61) ^{NS}	3.63 (1.88) ^{NS}	3.04 (1.80) ^{cb}	2.90 (1.77) ^b	3.25 (1.86) ^{bc}
Hooking Up	1.93 (1.67) ^{NS}	3.20 (1.91) ^{NS}	3.31 (2.06) ^b	2.48 (1.79) ^c	2.86 (1.98) ^c

Note. Different subscripts within each column indicate that means differed significantly at $p < .05$.

Facebook Wall Posts. Students were significantly more likely to flirt using FbWP within dating relationships than in the other three types of relationships (see Table 17). They were least likely to use FbWP within hooking up relationships for arranging plans and just chatting.

Table 16: Mean (SD) of Likelihood to Communicate using FbWP within Microtype and Communicative Act

	Communication Purpose				
	Micro	Plans	Flirt	Long Convo	Just Chat
Relational Microtype					
Dating	1.90 (1.75) ^{ab}	3.05 (1.94) ^a	3.84 (1.99) ^a	2.23 (1.83) ^a	3.22 (2.07) ^a
Talking To	1.63 (1.26) ^b	3.08 (1.77) ^a	3.13 (1.76) ^b	1.88 (1.39) ^{ab}	3.22 (1.88) ^a
Hanging Out	1.84 (1.50) ^a	3.28 (1.87) ^a	2.93 (1.73) ^b	2.03 (1.43) ^{ab}	2.93 (1.70) ^a
Hooking Up	1.62 (1.37) ^{ab}	2.46 (1.76) ^b	2.89 (1.97) ^b	1.80 (1.49) ^b	2.28 (1.64) ^b

Note. Different subscripts within each column indicate that means differed significantly at $p < .05$.

Instant Messaging. Participants reported being significantly less likely to IM in order to have long conversations or to just chat within hooking up relationships than in the other three types of relationships (see Table 18). They were also more likely to IM in dating relationships for three acts (flirting, long conversation, and just chatting) than in hanging out relationships and more likely to arrange plans in dating than in hooking up.

Table 17: Mean (SD) of Likelihood to Communicate using IM within Microtype and Communicative Act

	Communication Purpose				
	Micro	Plans	Flirt	Long Convo	Just Chat
Relational Microtype					
Dating	2.12 (2.13) ^a	2.56 (2.20) ^a	2.61 (2.22) ^a	2.44 (2.15) ^a	2.67 (2.26) ^a
Talking To	1.71 (1.57) ^b	2.30 (1.95) ^{ab}	2.33 (1.31) ^{ab}	2.27 (1.87) ^{ab}	2.48 (2.02) ^{ab}
Hanging Out	1.93 (1.79) ^{ab}	2.37 (1.93) ^{ab}	2.24 (1.22) ^b	2.13 (1.65) ^b	2.41 (1.90) ^b
Hooking Up	1.83 (1.68) ^{ab}	2.08 (1.83) ^b	2.34 (1.94) ^{ab}	1.78 (1.36) ^c	1.98 (1.50) ^c

Note. Different subscripts within each column indicate that means differed significantly at $p < .05$.

Email. Participants reported being significantly more likely to email in order to have long conversations within dating relationships than in the other three relationship types (see Table 19). They were more likely to flirt through email in dating relationships than in hanging out or hooking up relationships, and least likely to arrange plans in hooking up relationship.

Table 18: Mean (SD) of Likelihood to Communicate using Email within Microtype and Communicative Act

	Communication Purpose				
	Micro	Plans	Flirt	Long Convo	Just Chat
Relational Microtype					
Dating	1.34 (1.19) ^{NS}	1.93 (1.65) ^a	1.83 (1.65) ^a	1.92 (1.71) ^a	1.78 (1.63) ^a
Talking To	1.25 (1.02) ^{NS}	1.75 (1.48) ^a	1.57 (1.31) ^{ab}	1.61 (1.45) ^b	1.60 (1.41) ^{ab}
Hanging Out	1.25 (1.03) ^{NS}	1.78 (1.47) ^a	1.48 (1.22) ^b	1.54 (1.36) ^b	1.55 (1.34) ^{ab}
Hooking Up	1.21 (.99) ^{NS}	1.44(1.29) ^b	1.48 (1.33) ^b	1.35 (1.22) ^b	1.38 (1.24) ^b

Note. Different subscripts within each column indicate that means differed significantly at $p < .05$.

Summary of Results

As expected based upon the qualitative findings, participants indicated that they were familiar with the four relational microtype terms, used them in describing their own relationships, and believed that college students had similar definitions for those terms. In addition, the quantitative results indicated that there was a significant three-way interaction between communication medium, relational microtype, and communication act. However, significant differences in participants' likelihood to use email, IM, FbWP, and FbM were quite small (e.g., four tenths of a point), too small to be considered meaningful differences. These minute differences likely emerge as significant because of the increased power associated with the within subjects design (Cohen, 2001; Fields, 2008). The most substantial pairwise differences were found for students' use of phoning across relational microtypes and communication acts.

Consistent with the interview data, across all communication acts, students reported being most likely to call in dating relationships. Likelihood to phone did not differ between talking to and hanging out relationships for any of the communication acts. Also, as expected, participants were least likely to call a person they were hooking up with, regardless of communication act. While students reported being less likely to flirt via phone than to use it for any other act, they were significantly more likely to flirt via phone within dating relationships than any other relational microtype.

Significant differences were also found for students' use of texting that were consistent with the patterns of PCT use in the interview data. These differences were more pronounced when the communication act was less specific (e.g., to have a long conversation or just chat) than when it had a clear goal to accomplish (micro-coordination or arranging plans). In fact, dating

and talking to did not differ in likelihood to text in order to microcoordinate or arrange plans. However, within dating relationships students were significantly more likely to have long conversations or just chat through text than in the other three relationship types. Participants were also more likely to flirt via text message in talking to and hooking up relationships than in hanging out relationships.

The pairwise comparisons also indicated small, but significant differences for students' likelihood to use FbC. The only interpretable difference was in students' reported likelihood to just chat by using FbC. Within talking to relationships students were significantly more likely to just chat than in hanging out or hooking up relationships.

These results support the first qualitative conclusion. Within less developed (talking to, hanging out) and purely sexual (hooking up) relationships, participants were significantly more likely to send a text than make a phone call. Within dating relationships students were equally likely to communicate through texts or phone calls. As anticipated, students were significantly less likely to communicate through FbWP, IM, and Email than through the other media (texting, phoning, FbC, FbM).

The results also support the second expectation. Within dating relationships, students were significantly more likely to communicate using text messages for communicative activities with no clear goal (e.g., just chat and have a long conversation) than within talking to, hanging out, or hooking up relationships. Additionally, the analysis supports the expectation that students would be more likely to communicate through phone calls in dating relationships than in the other three relationship types. However, these results only partially help clarify the relationship between talking to and hanging out. For each communicative activity, were equally likely to call within talking to and hanging out relationships. This suggests that hanging out does not

represent a more developed relationship than talking to.

Finally, these results confirm that students are less likely to use Facebook than texting or phoning when in dating relationships. It was expected, based on the interviews, that students would be less likely to communicate through Facebook once in a dating relationship. In general, they were equally likely to use FbC and FbM within dating, talking to and hanging out relationships.

Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to describe and explain the ways in which college students navigate their romantic/sexual relationships through the use of PCTs. Mixed methods, including in-depth interviews and a quantitative survey were employed. The results revealed that these college students are incorporating new media into their intimate relationships in ways that vary according to the level of relationship development and the communicative activity.

The college students interviewed used a range of terms to describe their sexual and/or romantic encounters. The most frequent of these were: talking to, hanging out, dating and hooking up (RQ1). While in the interviews students reported using texting, calling, Facebook chat (FbC), Facebook messaging (FbM), Facebook wall posts (FbWP), instant messaging (IM) and email (RQ2), it is clear from the survey that, especially in less close relationships, they are more likely to use texting than any of the other media (RQ2). They also identified five communicative acts that influenced their likelihood to communicate: to micro-coordinate, arrange plans, flirt, have a long conversation and just chat (RQ3).

Unearthed during these interviews were interesting connections between relationships and the exploitation of communication technology affordances as a way to save face (Brown & Levinson, 1987; Cupach & Metts, 1994; Goffman, 1963) during the early stages of romantic relationships and hookups, which were characterized as times of greater relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999). The increased informational control afforded by lean technologies, primarily texting, but also FbC to some extent, made them especially attractive media for negotiating the early stages of romantic relationships (RQ4).

Additionally, the analysis of the interviews indicated that young adults attach different symbolic meanings to different communication technologies. Interviewees articulated the

symbolic importance of medium choice by indicating that a phone call “meant more” than a text message (RQ4). As is the case with many forms of mediated communication, the college students in this sample made the most of the cues available to them when attempting to decipher the motivations of their partners. For example, participants reported examining message length, time of day the message is sent, and time lag between when a message sent and replied to in order to try to gauge the other’s interest (RQ4).

These results carry implications for understanding how college students are negotiating their romantic/sexual relationships and the role that PCTs play in this process. This chapter addresses these implications, the limitations and strengths of this study and directions for future research.

Implications for the study of college courtship

This study contributes to the study of college courtship by examining the ways in which students are talking about their romantic and sexual entanglements. The terms talking to, hanging out, dating and hooking up were frequently used to describe their relationships, a finding that was confirmed by the survey. Like the students in Banker et al.’s (2010) study, these participants defined talking to as the initial stage of a romantic relationship wherein one has a casual, and possibly unexpressed, interest in the other person. When in a talking to relationship, students reported it was vital to appear casual, almost to the point of disinterest in order to avoid seeming desperate or clingy.

While some participants used the terms talking to and hanging out to describe different stages of early romantic relationship development, others did not. Interviewees disagreed about the extent to which the term referred to a step in relationship development. While some felt that hanging out described a relationship that was more developed than talking to, others believed it

was just another way to describe casual time spent with another person, regardless of romantic interest.

Based upon the more detailed patterns uncovered by the quantitative data, hanging out cannot definitively be identified as more serious than talking to. Media multiplexity (Haythornthwaite, 2005) as modified by Baym and Ledbetter (2009) suggests that if hanging out indicated a more developed relationship than talking to, participants should be more likely to communicate within hanging out than talking to relationships. However, participants were consistently less likely to communicate when hanging out than when talking to. Beyond media multiplexity, participants also reported being less likely to flirt when hanging out than when talking to or dating. This finding indicates that not all respondents conceptualized hanging out as a stage of romantic relationship development.

Hooking up was common in this college sample, with 85 percent of the survey respondents and 100 percent of the interviewees reporting that they had engaged in the practice at least once. Students in the interviews indicated that hooking up was a contested term, but could refer to sexual acts, ranging from kissing to intercourse, that occurred within a relationship hallmarked by the complete lack of commitment to the other (see also Bogle, 2008).

Respondents rarely reported either asking out or being asked out on an official date and indicated that the practice of traditional dating was largely a relic of the past. Participants did indicate that the term dating can refer to a planned, formal outing that occurs in a public space, but they did not go on 'dates' until after they were already in an exclusive, monogamous relationship. Until then, they would avoid asking others out on official dates to avoid the awkwardness that was inherent to the date request scenario. Likely because of their aversion to using the term dating to describe spending time together pre-exclusivity (which was generally

referred to as talking to or hanging out), dating was also used interchangeably with being in a long-term relationship; so if individuals were dating, they were in an exclusive relationship.

These findings support Bogle's (2008) conclusion that college students have moved away from traditional dating. This suggests that studies that focus on the dating practices of college students, or perhaps young adults more broadly, could be over-estimating the extent to which dating, in a traditional sense, is still a relevant practice for contemporary youths. Focusing only on traditional dating or on relationships geared toward long-term commitment would likely mean that researchers would be overlooking emergent trends in courtship practices on college campuses and missing the realities of their courtship behavior (e.g., Cupach & Metts, 1994; Knobloch, 2006; Laner & Ventrone, N. A.; Mongeau & Johnson, 1995; Mongeau, Morr Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004; Morr & Mongeau, 2004; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008).

Patterns of PCT Use Across Relationship Types

Relationships that are initiated face-to-face rarely stay that way. Much as models of online relationship development track the progression of media use as people grow closer (e.g., McKenna et al., 2002, Park & Floyd, 1996), research examining relationships that begin offline need to better document how relational partners move through multiple media and how media use is associated with relational development. This project contributes to knowledge in this area by exploring patterns of media use in college students' romantic/sexual relationships.

Participants indicated that they most often met potential romantic/sexual partners face-to-face and then moved into a combination of face-to-face and mediated communication. While survey respondents reported using email on a daily basis, they were not using this PCT within the confines of their romantic/sexual relationships. College students relied heavily on texting, and to a lesser extent, FbC in less developed (talking to and hanging out) and purely sexual

(hookup) relationships and move toward more frequent and longer phone calls if they grow closer (dating). In the interviews, students indicated that they had five basic reasons for communicating with their romantic/sexual partners: micro-coordinating, arranging plans, flirting, having long conversations and just chatting. Students' PCT use was patterned across relationship types and communication acts. The communicative act they hoped to accomplish affected how likely they were to contact their partner, especially within talking to, hanging out and hooking up relationships.

Students indicated that they were more likely to contact their partners early on in a relationship if they had an obvious goal to achieve (e.g., micro-coordinating or arranging plans) than if they just wanted to chat. For example, the survey revealed that, when dating, students were more likely to use text messages as a way to just chat or have a long conversation, but they were equally likely to text in order to micro-coordinate, arrange plans, or flirt in talking to and dating relationships. Additionally, in dating relationships students were equally likely to text or to phone their partners, even though in the interviews they indicated that they often found phone use to allow for a greater potential of positive face threat (Brown & Levinson, 1987). However, in talking to relationships, participants were more likely to text than to phone and they were equally likely to FbC as to make a phone call, except for flirting, which they were more likely to do via FbC.

The survey also indicated that regardless of communicative activity, participants were more likely to phone their partners within dating relationships than in any other relationship type. The difference between dating and talking to was more pronounced when just chatting. Students were least likely to phone when hooking up. This supports the interview data that suggested that

students associated phone use with relational closeness and indicated that phone use in less developed romantic or in sexual relationships would be “creepy” or “weird.”

The survey showed that communication through Facebook (chat, messaging and wall posts) was equally likely in dating, talking to and hanging out relationships. This suggests that not only do the number of media used predict relational closeness, so might the reasons for contact and the medium used. While having a larger media repertoire within a relationship indicates relational closeness (Baym & Ledbetter, 2005; Haythornthwaite, 2005) it does not take into account the reason for contact, which would be especially important for evaluating relational closeness. For example, a long phone call just to chat with a person likely indicates a higher level of relational closeness than a brief phone call to arrange plans.

In total, these results suggest that media switching, particularly the move from texting and FbC to phone calls, is particularly meaningful for college students. Thus, the move to phoning could be considered a turning point (Baxter & Bullis, 1985) in relationship development. Although Jin and Peña (2010) have argued that phone calls, because they are more like face-to-face communication than text messages, contribute more to uncertainty reduction and increasing love and commitment in romantic relationships, these conclusions are not consistent with the results of this study. This study finds that relational closeness, as developed through face-to-face and lean media (e.g., texting and FbC) communication, leads to phone use. Rather than PCT use driving relationship development, it is the combination of media affordances and relational closeness that shapes PCT use.

Theoretical Contributions

When students felt uncertain about their relationship, which they frequently did when talking to and hanging out, they manipulated PCT affordances in order to help maintain their

own positive face. Consequently, this study provides naturalistic support for Knobloch et al.'s (2010) finding that when individuals are experiencing higher levels of relational uncertainty they are more likely to appraise messages as face threatening. Indeed, when students were in less developed relationships they were more uncertain about the relationship and about their partner's intentions. Because of this, they were more hesitant to contact their partners and worried about appearing "desperate" or doing something that might be embarrassing. Their concerns about contact were especially heightened when engaging in communicative acts that were more ambiguous (e.g., just chat). Because of these concerns, in talking to relationships participants were more likely to contact their partners through lean media (e.g., text and FbC), which offered them more informational control, and thus more control over their positive face. This study also supports research suggesting that individuals are most concerned with their own positive face during relationship initiation (Knobloch et al., 2010; Wilson et al., 2009).

In fact, these students often reported relying on the digital affordances of lean media, especially texting, in order to remain strategically ambiguous. This ambiguity, or "controlled casualness" (Sims, 2007), allows participants to save face and avoid embarrassment if the object of their affection does not reciprocate their feelings. Rather than having to call or talk to the other face-to-face, where one might risk stumbling over words or saying something embarrassing, being able to carefully craft a text message helps reduce the face threat that is inherent to relationship initiation. As such, this study extends and provides qualitative support for O'Sullivan's (2000) work. These results confirm that students strategically employ lean media as a face saving strategy. In line with O'Sullivan (2000), students often reported engaging in strategic PCT use in order to manipulate their own desired self-presentation. However this

was especially likely in developing relationships characterized by relational uncertainty (Knobloch & Solomon, 1999).

Furthermore, when they were uncertain about their relationships, students also reported relying more heavily on the meaning imbued into message characteristic in order to decipher their partners' intentions. As individuals navigate the rocky terrain of college courtship, they attempt to gather information about and form impressions of others that allow them to reduce global uncertainty (Berger & Calabrese, 1975). Because, after the initial face-to-face meeting, participants often moved into using multiple media to communicate with their potential partners, they adapted their behaviors to the cues that are available to them (Walther, 1992). These data show that in the early parts of romantic relationships (e.g., talking to, and perhaps, hanging out), message characteristics, such as *message length*, *response lag*, *message frequency* and *time of day*, convey as much, if not more, relational meaning than the message content itself. This provides support for Walther's (1992) claim that when communicating in environments where traditional nonverbal cues are limited or absent, other cues will become more salient (see also Walther et al., 2005). This study adds to the growing body of research that finds support for Social Information Processing Theory (Walther, 1992) in more naturalistic data (see also Ellison et al., 2006). It also extends these findings into uncertainty reduction processes that occur via mobile technologies.

While past research (Ellison et al., 2006; Lea & Spears, 1992) has identified poor spelling and grammar as important to impression formation in text-based communication, these college students did not find spelling/grammar errors to be important. This can likely be attributed to the media ideologies (Gershon, 2010a, 2010b) they have for texting as opposed to constructing an online dating profile (Ellison et al. 2006) or sending email (Lea & Spears, 1992). As texting is

perceived to be an informal mode of communication (Gershon, 2010a) that abides by different grammar/spelling rules than communication in more formal media (e.g., email or letter writing), students likely have different standards and expectations for message construction.

The interviewees also articulated the symbolic importance of media use and the relational meaning conveyed by PCT choice was heightened by relational uncertainty. However, as relationships developed, and relational uncertainty was reduced, participants no longer felt PCT medium carried as much symbolic meaning. While previous work has examined the meanings employees attach to mediated communication within organizational contexts, this finding extends media symbolism (Fulk, 1992; Trevino et al. 1987) into the interpersonal realm.

Similarly, as relationships grew closer (i.e., moved into dating), participants worried less about the potential face threat that communicating with their partners represented. Thus, they felt more comfortable using the telephone to contact their partners, even though it offers less informational control than texting or FbC. Although students indicated that they had less relational uncertainty in dating relationships, this does not preclude the occurrence of events within the relationship that might prompt episodic relational uncertainty (Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Knobloch & Solomon, 2002). Thus, an uncertainty-increasing incident could occur within a dating relationship that might prompt individuals to more strategically employ communication media, perhaps eschewing phone calls in favor of leaner media where they can have more control over the message.

Studies that assume that students are using the phone in early stages of dating relationship (e.g., Knobloch, 2006; Knobloch et al. 2010) are not tapping into the realities of the contemporary college student dating scene. For example, in their study that examined the connections between uncertainty reduction theory and facework, Knobloch et al. (2010) asked

participants, who were in romantic relationships at various stages of development, to simulate leaving a message on their ‘partner’s’ voicemail. They found that while participants saw their messages as more risky when relational uncertainty was high, they did not make obvious attempts to verbally mitigate the risks. Perhaps Knobloch et al. (2010) did not find that college students were employing verbal face management strategies when leaving voicemail under conditions of high uncertainty, at least in part, because it is not a behavior that they would normally enact.

When high in relational uncertainty, students are reported making a priori decisions about which PCTs would best allow them to save face. Thus an experimental design that forced them to leave a voicemail message effectively eliminates one of their primary face saving strategies: media selection. Based upon these findings, it seems that when face threats are high, participants will be more likely to strategically choose media whose affordances would best allow them to control their self-presentation.

Finally, although media use does not cause relationship development, this study does help explain how media use changes as a relationship develops. However, while stage models of relationship development (Knapp, 1978; Knapp & Vangelisti, 2005) are a useful heuristic for understanding how relational communication changes as relationships grow, they are ill-equipped for capturing the complexities of contemporary relationships. For instance, at what stage does hooking up exist? While breadth and depth of conversation may suggest these relationships fit best within the initiation or the exploratory stage, it is not clear that sex, as a communicative act, exists on the same level as talking about a favorite sports team. As suggested earlier, perhaps turning point analyses (Baxter & Bullis, 1988) would be better able to fully grapple with the controlled casualness that hallmarks college courtship. Additionally,

initiation in contemporary college courtship is not as easy as straightforwardly asking out an attractive other. Courtship is very informal and might involve spending time together in groups, engaging in sex acts and sending text messages back and forth for weeks or even months, before going on a date or having a discussion about the status of the relationship. For these college students, romantic relationship initiation could be a slow process, characterized by intentional ambiguity, as both parties strive to maintain casual facades.

Practical Implications

Realizing that communicative competence extends to media choice is important to relationship formation (e.g., O’Sullivan, 2000). These results indicate that if a college student is interested in and reasonably certain that an attractive other returns his or her feelings, calling to arrange plans is a good way to indicate interest without having to explicitly acknowledge having romantic feelings. However, calling just to chat in the early stages of relationships can be off-putting. Thus, the right combination of media symbolism and communicative act can increase the chances the object of affection will understand the underlying intentions without being “weirded out.” Relying on the symbolic meaning conveyed by a short phone call to arrange an informal get together is a less face-threatening way to indicate interest early on in relationship development than bald, on-record date request. Recognizing this can enable college students to more effectively navigate the tricky and face threatening waters of early dating relationships.

Additionally, students should take advantage of the digital affordances of texting. While texting is much maligned in the popular press, it does allow for relationship development in ways that feel safer and less face threatening than calling. This study also confirms that technology use is not a zero-sum game; while students are likely to text their partners in developing relationship, they often use those messages to arrange face-to-face meetings. Texting is not

replacing face-to-face interaction. However, while texting is a useful tool in relationship development it is still important to competently use this PCT within relationships. For example, these students said that too much contact was “creepy.” Comparing the number of messages they had sent versus the number of messages they had received and their own message length versus the length of messages received determined contact appropriateness. Matching message length and frequency to that of the other can help individuals avoid inappropriate texting.

Strengths, Limitations and Directions for Future Study

This study is based in the rich descriptions college students had for their courtship practices. In semi-structured interviews, students were able to explain, in their own words, how they were navigating their romantic/sexual relationships and what role, if any, PCTs played in this process. Unlike studies that have relied upon outdated notions of college courtship (e.g., Laner & Ventrone, N. A.; Knobloch, 2006; Mongeau & Johnson, 1995; Mongeau, Morr Serewicz, & Therrien, 2004; Morr & Mongeau, 2004; Morr Serewicz & Gale, 2008), this study was better able to tap into the reality of the contemporary college experience. Still, additional studies that provide more in-depth information about the scripts college students are relying on for romantic/sexual relationship formation, and what role PCTs play in this process, are needed. While college students are forerunners of technology use, and represent a population where PCT use romantic/sexual relationships has become habituated, focusing on this population use does limit the generalizability of these findings. This is especially true because studies have shown that college students and older adults approach dating differently (e.g., Mongeau, Jacobsen, & Donnerstein, 2007).

In addition to convenience sampling, another limitation of this research is the potential for social desirability bias, which might have led participants to be less likely to honestly

describe their romantic, and especially, sexual relationships. However, the candor with which students spoke during the interviews, including using profane language and describing sexual acts in detail, suggest that this concern is unwarranted to some extent.

The use of mixed methods enabled the collection and analysis of qualitative data that uncovered reasons for PCT use in romantic/sexual relationships that would not have been gleaned from a purely quantitative study that examined patterns of PCT use. It also allowed for the patterns uncovered during the interview analysis to be tested in a larger population. However, because of the within subjects design of the survey, in a few cases the analysis detected very small differences as statistically significant. These exceptionally small differences, which primarily affected the seldom-used PCTs (e.g. email, IM, FbM, and FbWP), while statistically significant were essentially meaningless.

Furthermore, the way the survey was structured set up the communicative acts as mutually exclusive, when in fact they might well overlap. For example, one might send a text message to arrange plans in a manner that is also flirtatious. Although the interviews suggest that students perceive face-to-face communication as just another way to interact with their relational partners, the survey, due to concerns about participant fatigue, did not allow for comparisons between mediated communication and face-to-face communication. Finally, the quantitative portion of this study relied on reports of imagined behavior. While this allowed for college students' normative behavior to be examined, studies that measure actual PCT use at different stages of relationship development, or within different types of relationships, would be useful. Perhaps a diary methodology would enable researchers to more accurately capture PCT use.

By combining multiple theoretical perspectives, this project addresses scholar's concerns (Knobloch et al., 2010; Pfau, 2008; Putman, 2008) about theoretical dogmatism by incorporating multiple theories to describe and explain social phenomena. Although this study links four different perspectives (facework, uncertainty reduction, technological affordances and symbolic meaning of technologies) and suggests that learning how to appropriately incorporate PCTs into romantic relationships might increase satisfaction and lead to increased likelihood of additional relational development, it is primarily descriptive. Thus, follow up studies that systematically test the relationships between these constructs are needed. Finally, beyond testing the construct association, more exploration of the ways in which PCT use in college courtship is gender is warranted.

Conclusion

This chapter ends on a note of caution. As mentioned in the introduction, the use of communication technologies in romantic relationships is not a new phenomenon (Bailey, 1988; Fischer, 1992; Marvin, 1988; Standage, 1998). While it is tempting to focus on the ways in which newer PCTs are changing romantic/sexual relationship rituals, it is more useful to examine how people are employing technological affordances in ways that enable them to meet their relational or face needs. It is also important consider how new PCTs are used (Dimmick et al., 2000) and develop meaning (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) in relationship to existing technologies. While studying how people use a medium in isolation from others can provide useful information, situating those practices into the broader mediascape is essential to understanding technology use. Finally, not only is avoiding media myopia key to fully explaining PCT use, so too is avoiding the urge to needlessly invent concepts or terms to describe this use (see also Blumer, 1969). Examining, and then comparing and contrasting, the extent to which existing

theories or concepts account for the technological practices of interest allows for greater theoretical and conceptual refinement.

This study adds to the growing body of literature about how young adults are incorporating PCTs into their courtship practices (e.g., Gershon, 2010a, 2010b; Jin & Peña, 2010; Pascoe, 2009). It further develops knowledge in this area by coupling traditional interpersonal communication theories - uncertainty reduction and facework - with complementary perspectives about media use: technological affordances and media symbolism. Kunkel et al. (2003) called for additional insight into the ways in which partners communicatively navigate face-threatening episode and this study indicates that one way they do this is by strategically employing PCTs that offer the affordances and the symbolic meaning they need to preserve their own positive face.

It also confirms that college students are not following the traditional scripts for engaging in romantic relationships (see also Bogle, 2008; Pascoe, 2009). Instead, they rely on informal get-togethers, strategically ambiguous messages, media affordances and the symbolic meaning of PCTs in order to avoid the appearance of desperation. While traditional forms of dating and mating might have gone by the wayside, this does not necessarily indicate that these rituals have changed, as Brooks (2009) insinuated, for the worse. In fact, having access to more forms of media gives individuals more ways to protect their positive face when navigating romantic/sexual relationships.

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Appendix A: Interview Demographic Questionnaire

1. Sex: _____

2. Age: _____

3. What is your current grade level?

1. freshman 2. sophomore 3. junior 4. senior 5. post-graduate

4. Do you belong to a fraternity or a sorority? Yes No

5. What is your race or ethnic background?

1. ___ White/Caucasian

4. ___ Asian/Pacific Islander

2. ___ Black/African American

5. ___ Native American

3. ___ Hispanic/Mexican American.

6. Not Listed: _____

6. What is your religious affiliation? _____

7. What is your sexual orientation? 1. Heterosexual (straight) 2. LGBTQ

8. How many casual romantic relationships have you been involved in? _____

9. How many serious romantic relationships have you been involved in? _____

10. How many times have you “hooked up”? _____

11. How many people have you have sexual intercourse with? _____

12. Are you currently in a romantic relationship? Yes No

12a. How best would you describe the nature of your relationship? (circle one)

Is this person:

- a. someone you’ve flirted with, but haven’t yet been on a date with
- b. someone you’ve flirted with, and are planning to go on a date with
- c. someone you are casually dating but to whom you have no emotional attachment
- d. someone you are having sex with, but to whom you have no emotional attachment
- e. someone you date often but to whom you have no emotional attachment
- f. someone you are emotionally attached to but not in love with
- g. someone you are in love with
- h. someone you are in love with and would like to marry, but with whom you have never discussed marriage
- i. someone you are in love with and would like to marry, but have not made marriage plans
- j. someone you are engaged to marry
- k. Other (please explain): _____

Appendix B: Pilot Study Interview Protocol

1. How do men/women typically get together and form relationships?
2. Do you think your experiences with relationships compare to the types of relationships you see your peers engaging in?
3. Tell me about your current relationship partner. How would you describe your relationship?
4. What word to college students use to describe their romantic relationships? How about sexual relationships?

Probe for:

What does it mean to hookup?

Is there a difference between dating and hooking up?

5. If you met a person you were interested in while you were out one night, how would you expect to contact him/her? Text? Phone? Facebook?
6. How do you contact your relational partner?
7. How do you decide which communication medium to use to contact your partner?
8. Has your media use changed as your relationship has developed?
9. Do you use communication technologies differently in hooking up relationships than in dating relationships?
10. How would you expect a dating partner to use texting as a form of interpersonal communication in the beginning of a romantic relationship? (A hookup partner?)
11. How would you expect a dating partner to use the phone as a form of interpersonal communication in the beginning of a romantic relationship? (A hookup partner?)
12. How would you expect a dating partner to use SNSs in the beginning of a relationship?

13. How would you expect a dating partner to use twitter as a form of interpersonal communication in the beginning of a romantic relationship?

14. Why might you text instead of call and vice versa?

15. Tell me about time where you experienced or heard about a disagreement about how communication technology ought to be used.

16. What kinds of information do you disclose about your relationship online?

17. What kinds of information does your partner disclose about your relationship online?

17a. What kinds of information (pictures?) is it appropriate for your relational partner to disclose about you online?

17b. What kinds of information is it appropriate for your relational partner to disclose about your relationship online?

18. Are you ever uncertain about how to use PCTs in your romantic relationships?

19. Do you think that either you or your interaction partner communicates any differently depending on whether the conversation is face-to-face, on the phone, or online? If so, what are those differences?

20. What are the similarities in how you and your partner communicate regardless of the medium?

21. If you lost internet access, how do you think your romantic life would be affected, if at all?
(if you have ever lost access, how was your romantic life affected, if at all?)

22. If you could no longer use your cell phone (for phone calls and/or texting) how do you think your romantic life would be affected, if at all? (if you have ever lost access, how was your romantic life affected, if at all?)

23. In general, how would you compare your feelings about communicating in your romantic relationships in these ways: face-to-face, cell phone, texting, email, social networking sites?

Appendix C: Revised Interview Protocol

1. How do men/women typically get together and form relationships?

1a. Do you think your experiences with relationships compare to the types of relationships you see your peers engaging in?

1b. Do you currently have a romantic partner? Tell me about him/her. How would you describe your relationship?

2. What words do people use to describe the various kinds of relationships? (Probe for talking to, hanging out, hookup, date).

—How do you know it's a _____? (What is a (an) _____?)

—Have all you ever done is _____?

—Have you seen anyone else _____?

—How common is _____?

—Do you like _____?

—Tell me about one specific time, the last time.

3. Let's say you met a person you were interested in while you were out. You talk for a bit and you are interested in getting to know them better, what would be your next step?

3a. If you met a person you were interested in while you were out one night, how would you expect to contact him/her? Text? Phone? Facebook?

3b. Why might you text instead of call and vice versa?

4. Let's say you met a person you wanted to hookup with while you were out one night, what would be your next step?

4a. If you met a person you were interested in while you were out one night, how would you expect to contact him/her? Text? Phone? Facebook? Why?

- 4b. Why might you text instead of call and vice versa?
5. Do you use communication technologies differently in hooking up relationships than in dating relationships?
- 5a. How would you expect a dating partner to use texting as a form of interpersonal communication in the beginning of a romantic relationship? (A hookup partner?)
- 5b. How would you expect a dating partner to use the phone as a form of interpersonal communication in the beginning of a romantic relationship? (A hookup partner?)
6. Are you ever uncertain about how to use PCTs in your romantic relationships?

If currently in a romantic relationship/Have been in one recently:

7. How do you contact your relational partner?
8. How do you decide which communication medium to use to contact your partner?
9. Has your media use changed as your relationship has developed?

Social Network

10. How would you expect a dating partner to use SNSs in the beginning of a relationship?
11. Tell me about time where you experienced or heard about a disagreement about how communication technology ought to be used.
12. What kinds of information do you disclose about your relationship online?
13. What kinds of information does your partner disclose about your relationship online?
- 13a. What kinds of information (pictures?) is it appropriate for your relational partner to disclose about you online?
- 13b. What kinds of information is it appropriate for your relational partner to disclose about your relationship online?

Appendix D: Phase Two Survey

Communication Technology Use in College Courtship

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of the dating scene on college campuses. We are especially interested in the ways you all are using communication technologies (like Facebook, texting, etc.) in your romantic and/or sexual relationships. Your responses to this questionnaire can help researchers better understand how young adults, such as yourself, are using communication technologies when they meet potential romantic partners and form relationships. It would be great if you could be as detailed as possible in your responses. The more detail you provide, the better we will be able to understand how college students are actually forming romantic and/or sexual relationships!

For each question, please be honest. All of your responses are strictly confidential. We want to emphasize that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and that you can cease your participation at any time without penalty.

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR HELP!

Communication Technology Use in College Courtship

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study of the dating scene on college campuses. We are especially interested in the ways you all are using communication technologies (like facebook, texting, etc.) in your romantic and/or sexual relationships. Your responses to this questionnaire can help researchers better understand how young adults, such as yourself, are using communication technologies when they meet potential romantic partners and form relationships. It would be great if you could be as detailed as possible in your responses. The more detail you provide, the better we will be able to understand how college students are actually forming romantic and/or sexual relationships!

For each question, please be honest. All of your responses are strictly confidential. We want to emphasize that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and that you can cease your participation at any time without penalty.

THANK YOU SO MUCH FOR YOUR HELP!

COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY USE

Directions: We are interested in the types of communication technologies college students are using in their daily lives. How often do you use the following? Circle any number between 1 and 5 where 1 represents “never,” 3 represents “sometimes,” and 5 represents “often.”

	Never		Sometimes		Often
a) email	1	2	3	4	5
b) instant messaging	1	2	3	4	5
c) social networking sites (e.g facebook, myspace)	1	2	3	4	5

Which site(s) do you use?

f) cell phone calling	1	2	3	4	5
g) texting	1	2	3	4	5

Defining Terms

Directions: We are also interested in the kinds of terms college students use to describe the getting together with romantic or sexual partners. The following are terms other college students have indicated they used. Please indicate if you use this term and then define each in your own words. If there are terms that you do use that are not on listed here, please write them down and define them in the space below:

“Talking to”

I am familiar with this term (please circle one):	Yes	No
I think most college student agree about what this term means (circle one):	Yes	No
I use this term when talking about relationships (circle one):	Yes	No

Definition: _____

“Hanging out”

I am familiar with this term (please circle one): Yes No

I think most college student agree about what this term means (circle one): Yes No

I use this term when talking about relationships (circle one): Yes No

Definition: _____

“Hooking up”

I am familiar with this term (please circle one): Yes No

I think most college student agree about what this term means (circle one): Yes No

I use this term when talking about relationships (circle one): Yes No

Definition: _____

“Dating”

I am familiar with this term (please circle one): Yes No

I think most college student agree about what this term means (circle one): Yes No

I use this term when talking about relationships (circle one): Yes No

Definition: _____

Are there other terms you or other use to describe relationships? Please list and define below.

COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY USE IN RELATIONSHIPS

Directions: We are also interested in how college students are using communication technologies in different kinds of romantic and sexual relationships. For this section, you should think only about how you use the technology with a person who lives in the same general area as you and that you could easily meet in person.

EMAIL

How often would you use email for the following purposes? Be sure to only consider those people who live in the same general area as you and that you could easily see in person. Circle any number between 1 and 5 where 1 represents “not at all,” 3 represents “sometimes,” and 5 represents “most of the time.”

Not	Sometimes	Most
at All		of the
		Time

“TALKING TO”

How often would you **email** a person you are “talking to” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HANGING OUT”

How often would you **email** a person you are “hanging out” with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7

e) just “chat”	1	4	7
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“DATING”

How often would you **email** a person you are “dating” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HOOKING UP”

How often would you **email** a person you are “hooking up” with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

INSTANT MESSAGING

How often would you use **instant messaging** for the following purposes? Be sure to only consider those people who live in the same general area as you and that you could easily see in person. Circle any number between 1 and 5 where 1 represents “not at all,” 3 represents “sometimes,” and 5 represents “most of the time.”

Not	Sometimes	Most
at All		of the
		Time

“TALKING TO”

How often would you **instant message** a person you were “talking to” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HANGING OUT”

How often would you **instant message** a person you were “hanging out” with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“DATING”

How often would you **instant message** a person you were “dating” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HOOK UP: WANT TO”

How often would you **instant message** a person you are “hooking up”

with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE: CHAT

How often would you use **CHAT on a social networking site** (like facebook) for the following purposes? Be sure to only consider those people who live in the same general area as you and that you could easily see in person.

Circle any number between 1 and 5 where 1 represents “not at all,” 3 represents “sometimes,” and 5 represents “most of the time.”

Not	Sometimes	Most
at All		of the
		Time

“TALKING TO”

How often would you **chat** on a social networking site with a person you were “talking to” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HANGING OUT”

How often would you **chat** on a social networking site with a person you were “hanging out” with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“DATING”

How often would you **chat** on a social networking site with a person you were “dating” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HOOK UP: WANT TO”

How often would you **chat** on a social networking site with a person you are “hooking up” with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

How often would you use **MESSAGING** on a social networking site (like facebook) for the following purposes?

Be sure to only consider those people who live in the same general area as you and that you could easily see in person. Circle any number between 1 and 5 where 1 represents “not at all,” 3 represents “sometimes,” and 5 represents “most of the time.”

Not	Sometimes	Most
at All		of the
		Time

“TALKING TO”

How often would you use **messaging** on a social networking site with a person you were “talking to” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HANGING OUT”

How often would you use **messaging** on a social networking site with a person you were “hanging out” with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“DATING”

How often would you use **messaging** on a social networking site with a

person you were “dating” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HOOKING UP”

How often would you use **messaging** on a social networking site with a person you are “hooking up” with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just chat	1	4	7

SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE: WALL POSTS

How often do you write a WALL POST on a social networking site (like facebook) for the following purposes? Be sure to only consider only those people who live in the same general area as you and that you could easily see in person. Circle any number between 1 and 5 where 1 represents “not at all,” 3 represents “sometimes,” and 5 represents “most of the time.”

Not	Sometimes	Most
at All		of the
		Time

“TALKING TO”

How often would you post write a **wall post** on a social networking site for a person you were “talking to” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HANGING OUT”

How often would you write a **wall post** on a social networking site for a person you were “hanging out” with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“DATING”

How often would you write a **wall post** on a social networking site or a person you were “dating” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HOOKING UP”

How often would you write a **wall post** on a social networking site for a person you are “hooking up” with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just chat	1	4	7

TEXTING

How often would you use **texting** for the following purposes? Be sure to only consider only those people who live in the same general area as you and that you could easily see in person. Circle any number between 1 and 5 where 1 represents “not at all,” 3 represents “sometimes,” and 5 represents “most of the time.”

Not	Sometimes	Most
at All		of the
		Time

“TALKING TO”

How often would you **text** a person you were “talking to” in order to

a) let them know you've arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just "chat"	1	4	7

"HANGING OUT"

How often would you **text** a person you were "hanging out" with in order to

a) let them know you've arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just "chat"	1	4	7

"DATING"

How often would you **text** a person you are "dating" in order to

a) let them know you've arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just "chat"	1	4	7

"HOOKING UP"

How often would you **text** a person you are "hooking up" with in order to

a) let them know you've arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
---	---	---	---

b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just chat	1	4	7

PHONE USE (INCLUDES MAKING CALL ON A CELL PHONE)

How often would you use **phone calls** for the following purposes? Be sure to only consider only those people who live in the same general area as you and that you could easily see in person. Circle any number between 1 and 5 where 1 represents “not at all,” 3 represents “sometimes,” and 5 represents “most of the time.”

Not	Sometimes	Most
at All		of the
		Time

“TALKING TO”

How often would you **call** a person you were “talking to” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HANGING OUT”

How often would you **call** a person you were “hanging out” with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7

d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“DATING”

How often would you **call** a person you were “dating” in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just “chat”	1	4	7

“HOOKING UP”

How often would you **call** a person you are “hooking up” with in order to

a) let them know you’ve arrived at the house/party/bar/etc.	1	4	7
b) arrange plans	1	4	7
c) flirt	1	4	7
d) have a long conversation	1	4	7
e) just chat	1	4	7

DESCRIBING YOURSELF

1. Sex: _____

2. Age: _____

3. What is your current grade level?

1. freshman 2. sophomore 3. junior 4. senior 5. post-graduate

4. Do you belong to a fraternity or a sorority? Yes No

5. What is your race or ethnic background?

1. ___ White/Caucasian

4. ___ Asian/Pacific Islander

2. ___ Black/African American

5. ___ Native American

3. ___ Hispanic/Mexican American.

6. Not Listed: _____

6. What is your religious affiliation? _____

7. What is your sexual orientation? 1. Heterosexual (straight) 2. LGBTQ

8. How many casual romantic relationships have you been involved in? _____

If you have been in a casual romantic relationship, please answer the following questions:

8a. Of these relationships, what percent of them have you initiated? _____

8b. Think of your most recent casual romantic relationship, how did you meet this person?

- a. in a class you took together
- b. randomly at a bar
- c. randomly at a party
- d. introduced by mutual friends
- e. through an online dating service
- f. Other: _____

9. How many serious romantic relationships have you been involved in? _____

If you have been in a serious romantic relationship, please answer the following questions:

9a. Of these relationships, what percent of them have you initiated? _____

9b. Think of your most recent serious romantic relationship, how did you meet this person?

- a. in a class you took together
- b. randomly at a bar
- c. randomly at a party
- d. introduced by mutual friends
- e. through an online dating service
- f. Other: _____

10. Using the definition of “hooked up” you provided earlier, how many times have you “hooked up”?

- a. 0
- b. 1-5
- c. 6-10
- d. 11-15
- e. 16-20
- f. 21+ Please indicate how many: _____

If you have hooked up, please answer the following questions:

10a. Of these hookups, what percent of them have you initiated? _____

10b. Think of your most hookup, how did you meet this person?

- a. in a class you took together
- b. randomly at a bar
- c. randomly at a party
- d. introduced by mutual friends
- e. through an online dating service
- f. Other: _____

11. How many people have you have sexual intercourse with? _____

12. Are you currently in a romantic relationship? Yes No

12a. If yes, how long have you been with this person?

_____ days _____ weeks _____ months _____ years

12b. How best would you describe the nature of your relationship? (circle one)

Is this person:

- l. someone you’ve flirted with, but haven’t yet been on a date with
- m. someone you’ve flirted with, and are planning to go on a date with
- n. someone you are casually dating but to whom you have no emotional attachment
- o. someone you are having sex with, but to whom you have no emotional attachment
- p. someone you date often but to whom you have no emotional attachment
- q. someone you are emotionally attached to but not in love with
- r. someone you are in love with
- s. someone you are in love with and would like to marry, but with whom you have never discussed marriage
- t. someone you are in love with and would like to marry, but have not made marriage plans
- u. someone you are engaged to marry
- v. Other (please explain): _____

13. Are you an international student?

Yes

No

Appendix E: Summary of RQ1 Themes

RQ1: What terms are college students using to describe their romantic/sexual relationships?

Theme	Sub-themes	Examples
Relational Microtypes	(a) Talking to	(a) <i>“Talking to means the potential of dating is there but nothing is set in stone, not Facebook official. Just flirting and the potential to date is there.”</i>
	(b) Hanging out	(b1) <i>“Hanging out is nothing... unless you were already talking to them. Because you hang with all of your friends.”</i> (b2) <i>“To me there’s like talking to and hanging out and then dating and then in a relationship.”</i>
	(c) Dating	(c) <i>“Dating is when you’re in a longterm relationship I guess. Long term to college kids. But you’re in some sort of relationship that you might nurture to make last.”</i>
	(d) Hooking up	(d) <i>“Hooking up is a one-night thing. Definitely. It doesn’t necessarily include sex, but it’s definitely “Oh I just hooked up with that guy one time. I don’t even know his name.”</i>

Appendix F: Summary of RQ3 Themes

RQ3: What reasons do students give for using PCTs in their romantic/sexual relationships?

Theme	Sub-Theme	Example
Communicative Acts	(a) Micro-coordination	(a) <i>"We text to set plans and then call him when I show up. Like 'I'm here!'"</i>
	(b) Arranging plans	(b) <i>"Like a quick phone call in the afternoon saying, 'Hey, I'm going to a show tonight. I wanted to see if you wanted to go with me.' I mean, that would be awesome."</i>
	(c) Just chatting	(c) <i>"You have to have a reason [to call], unless you're like dating or you're together you're not going to call them and talk like just to talk."</i>
	(d) Flirting	(d) <i>"Like flirting over Facebook chat or like at night. You can flirt with them over Facebook or instant messaging. But texting is probably the biggest one."</i>
	(e) Long conversation	(e) <i>"Sometimes if it's something really serious or I have a lot I want to get out I will Facebook message him because we do really well emailing back and forth."</i>
Underlying Motivations	(a) Relational Uncertainty	(a) <i>"And it's weird how words mean so much, but it does. It's like, 'Okay, you're my girlfriend now, so great.' I know you're not talking to anyone else and I'm not talking to anyone else. We're both okay. I feel comfortable calling you and talking to you, not just asking questions, more like, 'Tell me about your day.'"</i>

	(b) Facework	<i>(b) “It’s [texting] not as personal and you’re not as susceptible to making an idiot of yourself. And if you get turned down then you don’t have to be like, ‘Okay, well then I’ll talk to you later. Have a good night.’ Relationships are so awkward and they’re going to be awkward. Everything about boy-meets-girl is awkward and text messaging reduces the awkwardness so people use it to their advantage and I don’t blame anyone for wanting to use text messaging.”</i>
	(c) Media affordances: (c1) Reduced social cues	<i>(c1) “You don’t have to hear her voice. You can think. You’re not on the spot. Like if you said something stupid, you can’t take it back, but if type it out then read it you can delete it before you send it.”</i>
	(c2) Perceived privacy	<i>(c2) I prefer [Facebook] messages [to Facebook wall posts] so I could say more in it without worrying about if one of my professors or one of my parents are reading it.</i>
	(c3) Temporal structure	<i>(c3) “Because you have more time to think about what you’re going to say”</i>
	(c4) Mobility	<i>(c4) “It [texting] is the biggest form of communication is most important, because it is so easy. You don’t always have your computer, but you always have your phone and it is so easy to text, everyone is so good at it.”</i>

Appendix G: Summary of RQ4 Themes

RQ4: What meanings do participants attach to PCT use in romantic/sexual relationships?

Theme	Sub-Theme	
Symbolic meaning of media use	(a) Symbolic meaning of media choice	<i>"I think a phone call definitely means more than a text message. It's obviously more personal and more awkward so it shows he cares if he's willing to put up with how awkward it is because guys avoid awkward situations."</i>
	(b) Symbolic meaning of message characteristics : (b1) Message length	<i>(b1) "Length shows that they're taking their time, their interested. [...] Length shows that they care more about their message."</i>
	(b2) Response lag	<i>(b2) "If I am just going to be completely straight with you, the time distance that it takes for someone to return a text, it really plays an important component, to me at least because if it is long periods of time, it is either they are not interested or they aren't into their phone which usually isn't the case with girls."</i>
	(b3) Message frequency	<i>(b3) "Like if they are sending you like one word/ two word messages back, don't keep sending messages, like maybe that's too much."</i>
	(b4) Time of day	<i>(b4) "If they are texting you more at night then it's more of like a booty call thing, and if they are texting you throughout the day it's more like a hey I like you we should hang out more."</i>